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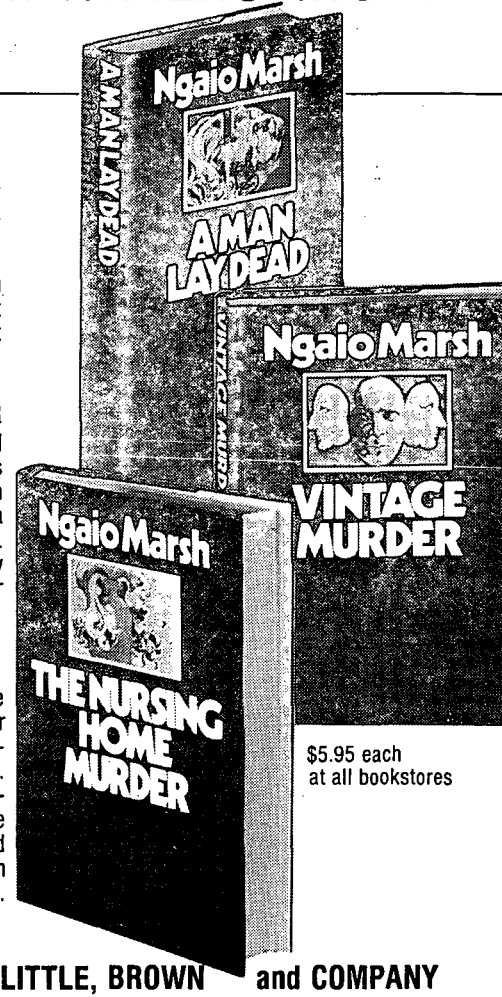

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ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

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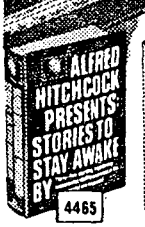

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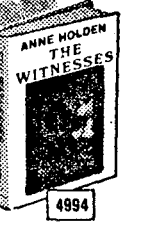
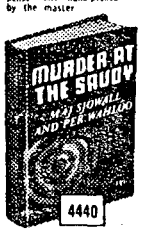


Cheating wife endangers lover's life by making him report a murder only she's seen.



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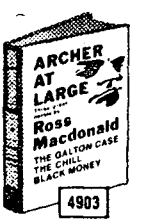

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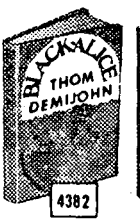

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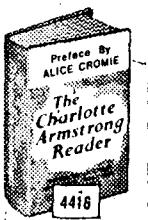
Gypsy troupe, mysterious discovery turn idyllic setting into death trap for amateur sleuth.

Five seemingly accidental deaths turn movie making trip into voyage of terror.



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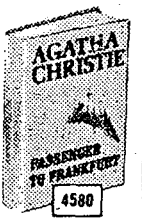

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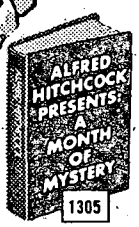

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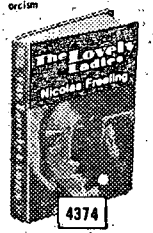

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a *NEW* Behrens-Calder exploit by

MICHAEL GILBERT

first publication in the United States

Mr. Behrens had been given a difficult and unusual assignment. But surely Mr. Behrens, the man who had met Hitler—not once, but twice—could handle a dangerous situation. And if Mr. Behrens should find that he needed help, there was always Mr. Calder waiting in the wings, ready to step onstage and move into instant action. . .

THE MAN WHO HAD MET HITLER

by MICHAEL GILBERT

When Mr. Behrens had got in, it had been an Underground train full of people. Now emerging into the pale sunlight of a late January afternoon, shedding passengers at every stop, it was pottering unhurried and almost empty through the flat countryside of the Thames delta; past stations whose names ended romantically in Tree and Wood and Park, but which exhibited an unbroken vista of bricks and mortar; past back gardens, and small derelict factories; out to the farthest tip of the most recently constructed tentacle of the London Transport system, Wallingford Bridge, a brand-new station built to accommodate the brand-new University of Middlesex.

The overhead street lamps were glowing orange in the dusk and there was a powdering of snow on the pavement as Mr. Behrens carried his battered suitcase out of the station and up the long slope which led to the High Street. As he reached it, he became conscious that something was happening.

A group of people was marching down the middle of the road. Most of them were singing or shouting. A lot of traffic had piled up behind

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them. As they approached, Mr. Behrens was able to make out some of the words. The battle cry was "Stoo-dent—Rep-res-en-Tay-shun."

One group of hirsute singers was giving a rendering of *John Brown's Body*, with a chorus of "We won't shave until we get it." A second, rather larger group was putting over "We'll hang Jack Harraway on a sour apple tree." The only people neither singing nor shouting were the policemen marching beside the leaders.

There were three people in the front rank, and Mr. Behrens was able to see them clearly as they walked past. In the middle strode a thickset, red-faced young bull. Sixteen stone of muscle and intolerance. On his right, a thin coffee-colored youth with black hair, a hairline black mustache, and an appearance of serious gravity. On his left, and thus closest to where Mr. Behrens was standing, was a girl with a white face and a head of copper curls. Even under the neon lighting, which was being unkind to her, she made a striking figure.

Mr. Behrens stood watching until the noise and shouting had faded into the distance and the last frustrated motorist had ground past. Then he continued on his way. It had started to snow again.

Anyone, he thought, to whom the word "University" still conjured up visions of mellow stone, creeper-covered walls and smooth lawns would have been in for a shock when confronted with the University of Middlesex. Particularly if the confrontation took place at dusk under a lowering sky. The buildings were not only raw, but seemed to have been designed on an over-ambitiou. plan, modified from motives of economy, then replanned in a hurry. The general effect was something between a council estate and an army cantonment.

He located the Rector's Lodge at the far end of this conglomeration and was welcomed by the Rector, Dr. Harraway, a plump white-haired man with a professionally ready smile. He said, "Come in, come in. You look frozen. You had to walk? This shortage of taxis is a scandal. An absolute scandal. It's Behrens, isn't it? I'm so glad you've been able to join the faculty as a temporary member. At such short notice, too. You'll be covering Modern European Social and Economic History. When the Minister recommended you to us—a very warm personal recommendation, incidentally—he mentioned that you were a linguist as well."

Mr. Behrens said, "I have a

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smattering of most European languages."

"That should be very useful. Many of the leading authorities in your field are published in German. As, of course, you are aware. Is it too much to hope that you might be considering joining us permanently?"

"That will depend on how I get along with your students. I passed a number of them when I was on my way here. An army with banners."

"They do demonstrate rather a lot," said Dr. Harraway. "What was it about this time?"

"The only slogan I could actually make out was Hang Jack Harraway."

The Rector laughed delightedly. "High spirits. They mean no harm. I must have been hung in effigy a dozen times since I took over at the beginning of last year. It doesn't worry me a scrap."

"Just so long as they continue to do it in effigy, Rector," said Mr. Behrens, and took his leave.

It was two days later that he faced his first class. He was interested to find in it all three of the leaders of the demonstration. He had already discovered something about them. The girl was Alison Varney, daughter of Samuel Varney, the property millionaire. The big Irishman was Patrick Meaghan. His grandfather had helped to hold the Dublin Post Office on Easter Day 1916 and had died in its ruins. The thin boy, as he already knew, was Ahmed bin Akbar bin Suleiman, heir-apparent to the Ruler of Ras-al-Daar.

On the supposition that what interested him might also interest his students, Mr. Behrens had chosen to discourse about conditions in Germany between the Wars. He had dealt with Kurt Eisner and with the provisional government of Hoffman and was starting on Bela Kun's Communist regime when the flame-haired Alison interrupted him. She did it politely enough, holding up her hand, and saying, "Do you mind us interrupting you when we want to ask something?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Behrens. "Why?"

"Oh, some of the lecturers get very shirty if we do."

"I can assure you," said Mr. Behrens smoothly, "that an amateur lecturer like myself, and one who is rather out of practice at that, positively welcomes interruptions. It not only gives him a breathing space but insures that the notes he has prepared will last out the hour."

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The laugh that greeted this sally was good-natured.

"It was just this," said Alison. "The last period you've been describing. It must have been pretty ghastly. But we know what it was followed by, and that was Hitler. Do you think that Hitler's sort of rule was better, on balance, than what went before?"

"I think," said Mr. Behrens slowly, "that Hitler was an unqualified disaster. For Germany and for the whole Western world."

"Isn't that a judgment you're making from postwar books?" said Ahmed.

"If you mean, is it a judgment I'm making only from books, the answer is No. I can speak from personal experience also."

"You met him? Met Hitler?"

"Twice."

"But those would be formal meetings. You could make no judgment from them."

"One was formal. One was informal," said Mr. Behrens evasively. "I saw no occasion on either occasion to question the verdict of history. Which brings us back to the point. Anarchy and political chaos are usually followed by dictatorship."

"Is that an invariable rule?" said Ahmed. He sounded genuinely interested.

"No, not invariable. There are exceptions. In Ireland, for instance, political chaos is normally followed by political chaos."

This roused Patrick Meaghan, as, indeed, it had been intended to do. The rest of the hour passed pleasantly enough.

"Who is this man?" asked Meaghan, yawning prodigiously. The three of them were in Alison's cell-like room, Ahmed and Alison sitting on the bed and Pat Meaghan overflowing the only chair.

"He's taking Morovitz's lectures for the rest of this term," said Alison.

"That must be an improvement, however bad he is."

"I think he's rather sweet. And for God's sake stop yawning, Patrick."

"I feel sleepy."

"You can't feel sleepy at four o'clock in the afternoon. And we've got important matters on the agenda. Item one: tomorrow's demonstration."

"You are determined it shall be violent?" said Ahmed.

"Yes, I am. Nonviolence has failed. All we've done so far is to hold up the traffic. We've made no impression on the authorities at all." She gave Ahmed a look which was almost motherly and said, "There's no need for you to

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join in if you don't want to."

"I shall join with the others."

"You don't sound convinced."

"I'm convinced of the rightness of what we are asking for—not to be treated as children, to have a say in our own affairs. And I am not afraid of violence—I come from a violent country. Of its last six rulers, four have died by violence. But violence leads to hardening of attitudes. At the moment few of us feel any animosity towards the authorities. I feel none. To be violent without being provoked seems to me to be wanton."

Alison sighed. She said, "It's very difficult. We'll give Pat the deciding vote." A strangled snore came from the chair. "For God's sake, he's asleep!"

Alex Fraser was clearly a tycoon. His office, on the eighth floor of the building overlooking the Thames, proclaimed as much. It had wall-to-wall carpeting, comfortable chairs, a desk the size of a conference table, and, in one corner, a neat scale model of a drilling rig. Mr. Fraser's blonde secretary, herself a neat scale model, proclaimed it, too. The only unpretentious thing about the whole setup was Alex Fraser himself. He was small, had a nut-brown face crowned by a mop of graying hair, and was wearing a suit which must have been ten years old at least, and far from well looked after.

Mr. Calder took in these points at a glance. Being himself a man who disliked pretension, he was prepared, on balance, to disregard the tycoonery and approve of the person.

"It's a damned serious situation," said Mr. Fraser. "East Gulf Oil Company, which is one of our subsidiaries, has been working a number of concessions down near Muscat and Oman. They're very promising. And the most promising survey report I've ever read in my life is the one we've just completed in Ras-al-Daar."

"Congratulations."

"Congratulations would be premature. What we had was an exploration contract, not a drilling contract. That has still to be signed."

Mr. Calder said, "Ras-al-Daar? That's old Sheik Akbar. I used to know him quite well. He never struck me as being unduly greedy."

"He's not greedy. He's a desert Arab of the old stock. And he's got ideals. He's seen what money has done to other small Arab States."

"Instant Western civilization. A package deal available overnight." Mr. Calder shuddered.

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"It's not all bad. He realizes that. The oil revenues will pay for hospitals and roads and education. It'll also bring in alcohol and traffic accidents and the quick-money boys. And jealousy from any neighbor who isn't lucky enough to possess oil. And unrest from his own subjects."

"Not a very attractive balance sheet."

"Well, maybe I've exaggerated a bit. Anyway, that's what the old man's thinking about. And to find out how Western civilization is working out in practice, he's sent his son to an English University. The F.O. recommended Middlesex. Being new they thought it might be less troublesome."

"The students may be new, but they're learning fast. Two days ago they heaved a couple of bricks through the Rector's window. I understand that the change in the Rector's outlook was positively startling. He stopped being a genial uncle or elder brother and became a roaring lion."

"It's wonderful what a well-placed brick will do," said Mr. Fraser. "I only hope the thrower wasn't Ahmed."

"Ahmed was in the forefront of the battle. Mercifully he wasn't pulled in. The police had all their work cut out arresting a wild Irishman. But there's no saying he won't be in trouble next time. And if he spends even one night inside an English jail, I imagine your chances in the Eastern Gulf will look a bit sketchy."

Fraser got up, moved across to the corner of the room, and stared malevolently at the model oil rig. He said, "I don't suppose I need explain to you, Calder, just *how* valuable a good concession in that part of the world would be to us right now."

"You don't need to explain," said Mr. Calder. "We're taking it seriously all right. My chief, Mr. Fortescue, sent a colleague of mine, Mr. Behrens, down there to keep an eye on things. Now he wants me to go down and lend a hand. Normally Behrens would have been perfectly capable of dealing with a situation like this on his own, but there's a complication."

"What sort of complication?"

"This one's got auburn hair. Her name is Alison Varney."

"Sam Varney's daughter?"

"That's right."

"It was bad enough without that," said Fraser gloomily.

Mr. Behrens said, "There's the bell for lunch. Enough for this morning. We'll knock off, shall we?"

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Alison Varney shuffled her books and papers into a pile on Mr. Behrens' table, sighed, and said, "I'm not really hungry. How could anyone be, with the food they serve up here?"

Mr. Behrens was busy filling his pipe. He said, "Eating's a thing you either worry about a great deal or not at all. I'm in the second category. When I'm at home I'm cooked for by my aunt. She permutes on three dishes. Mince, chicken casserole, and Irish stew." He had the pipe going nicely now. He added, between puffs, "I've got so little sense of taste that I find them indistinguishable."

Alison said, "Tell me something, Mr. Behrens. What are you doing here?"

"Endeavoring to lecture in Social and Economic History."

"Come off it. You're not a don."

"What makes you think that?"

"You don't look like one. Or talk like one. Or think like one."

"You've made a study of the species?"

"Indeed; yes. This is the third University I've been to. I was expelled from the other two. For violent and subversive behavior."

"Did they know that when they accepted you here?"

"Yes. But my father promised them a handsome grant to finish the library."

"I see."

"Do tell. You're some sort of official. An Inspector?"

"Oh, dear," said Mr. Behrens. "Am I such an obvious civil servant?"

"Or are you something more exciting than that? I have it. You're a member of M. I. 5. Come down to spy on us."

Mr. Behrens swallowed a mouthful of smoke and started to splutter. Alison patted him on the back and said, "Own up."

"Since you have guessed half the truth," said Mr. Behrens, "I'll tell you the whole. I was planning to take you into my confidence anyway. I've been sent down here to keep an eye on Ahmed, and see he isn't led astray by wild companions."

"Meaning Patrick and me?"

"Yes."

"And how were you aiming to do it?"

"I've often found that in a tricky situation the best plan is to co-opt your opponents onto your own side."

"Cool. Tell me more."

"Ahmed's father is hereditary ruler of a patch of desert in the Southeast corner of the Gulf. It's rather smaller than the Isle of Wight, has a population of nomad Arabs who live by date growing and

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camel farming with a sideline in gold smuggling. Additionally, it looks as if it might be the brightest prospect for oil that's been turned up for many a year. It would do us a power of good if we were allowed to develop it. Normally, we should be—we discovered it. And we're first in the field for a concession. But if Ahmed gets slung out of an English University or into an English jail, our prospects will be dim."

"And you're suggesting that I should tell him to be a good boy so that an oil company can make some money?"

"Not an oil company, " said Mr. Behrens. "England."

"Don't tell me you're going to start beating the patriotic drum. Rule Britannia. The Army, Navy, and Air Force."

"Yes, indeed. And since you mention it, the Air Force in particular. It's amazing to think that thirty years ago there really *were* young men who grew huge mustaches and said things like 'Bang on' and 'Wizard prang' and fought their private battles five miles above the fields of Kent, and were burned to death, quite a lot of them, big mustaches and all. And when they knew they were dying weren't entirely unhappy, because they were doing it for England. Does that make you laugh?"

In the silence that followed, Mr Behrens could hear the distant trampling of feet down the corridors and the banging of doors.

Alison said, "I'm not sure. It's the sort of thing that either makes you laugh or cry. It depends how you look at it. But the point is that it's an anachronism."

"If you mean that we're never going to have another conventional war, I agree with you. More's the pity, I sometimes think."

"Do you mean you *want* another war?"

"It wouldn't affect me. I'm too old. It's the young people I'm thinking about. Fancy living your whole life without ever having a cause worth dying for. Maybe that's what makes them so discontented."

"We have got a cause."

"Breaking the Rector's windows?"

"You say that because you don't understand. He can mend his windows. He can't mend his public image."

"What's wrong with his public image?"

"It's a fraud. These places are selling second-class goods. Not even second-class. Shoddy third-class. But it's such a seller's market for Universities just now that they can get away with it. The teaching's a farce.

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Most of the students could get on faster if they sat at home and read the books. The brighter ones do."

"You can't manufacture dons overnight."

"Agreed. But what about the living conditions? One bathroom for forty students. When it works. Rabbit-hutch cubicles with walls so thin you can hear people talking three rooms away. And the food! If you served up muck like that at Dartmoor you'd have a prison riot."

"And how would you improve it?"

"Simple. Hand over all administrative arrangements to a committee of students. Do you realize that we've got men here who'd be helping to run businesses if they weren't at University? Women who'd be married, keeping house, maybe looking after a couple of children. And they treat us as though we were children ourselves. That's what we're fighting against. And we're going to go on fighting. I don't suppose any of us will be killed. But we'll be uncomfortable, and some of us will be hurt."

"Suppose I were to agree," said Mr. Behrens, "that every word you've said is true. I think you've exaggerated it, but suppose it is true. Must Ahmed be one of the rebels?"

"He and Pat Meaghan are the leaders. Pat's in jail. If Ahmed backed out, we'd have to start all over again."

"You underrate yourself. They're not the leaders. You are."

"Even if that was true," said Alison seriously, "I'm not prepared to go on alone."

"You realize that if you go on at all, you're heading for real trouble. Few people fight dirtier than aroused Establishment."

"If it's going to be a tough and dirty fight, we need a tough and dirty leader. Would you care to take on the job? I'm sure you'd be beautifully unscrupulous. What about it?"

Mr. Behrens sighed. He said, "I'm not involved in this fight."

"But you'd enjoy it, wouldn't you? Do you know *when* I spotted you were different from the rest of the professors? It was when you were talking about Hitler. It's true, isn't it? You did meet him."

"Yes."

"When?"

"It was in Russia," said Mr. Behrens. "In 1943. He made me a personal presentation of the Dresdener Kreuz with crossed palm leaves. I don't think he'd have done it if he'd known that my reason for being there was to arrange for an explosive

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device to be placed in his private airplane."

"There you are," said Alison. "What did I say? You're just the man we need to run a student riot."

Mr. Calder sat in the Saloon Bar of the Duke of Pomfret public house in a back street of Wallingford. Thickset, middle-aged, nondescript in appearance and dress, he attracted no attention and desired to attract none.

The snow had changed to frozen rain. The bar was warm and crowded. Mr. Calder sipped his whiskey and cast an occasional glance at the small serving hatch, through which he could see most of the public bar.

The stout man he was following was sitting in a corner by himself, spinning out half a pint of beer and occasionally glancing at his watch. It was getting near nine o'clock before the second man joined him. This was a small spruce character with the look of a prosperous jockey. He carried his drink over and the two men talked for a few minutes. When the packet was passed it was done so inconspicuously that if Mr. Calder had not been watching very closely he would have missed it.

Soon afterward the stout man lumbered to his feet, wrapped a scarf round his neck, said a general "Good night" to the bar, and made his way into the darkness of the street. With his head bent forward against the stinging rain he was unaware of anyone behind him until Mr. Calder put one hand on his shoulder.

When the stout man swung round, Mr. Calder clipped him scientifically on the side of the throat, caught him as he fell, gasping for breath, and lowered him gently to the ground. He found the packet in a coat pocket and transferred it to his own. By the time he had done this the stout man was already recovering.

Mr. Calder helped him up into a sitting position with his back against the railings and said, "If I were you, Mr. Ponting, I should go straight home now. You'll get a nasty cold if you sit about in this weather."

"Who exactly *is* Mr. Ponting?" said Mr. Behrens two days later.

"He keeps a small tobacco and sweet shop," said Mr. Calder. "It's just behind the University and he has a lot of student customers. I'm afraid he sells them nastier things than cigarettes and sweets."

"Cannabis?"

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"Yes."

"Hard stuff?"

"I don't think he's got round to it. At the moment he's strictly on the amateur pot-line. It was because I recognized one of the carriers, a nasty little man called Jocko Sampson, that I was able to get on to him so quickly."

"Bad," said Mr. Behrens. "But not too bad yet. What are the authorities going to do about it?"

"It depends what line the Rector decides to take. Ponting, who has about as much courage as a small mouse, tried to buy himself out of the worst of the mess by indentifying six students who had had stuff from him. My advice to the Rector was to let me throw a scare into Ponting which would shut him up for good, while he gives the students concerned the dressing down of their young lives."

"Will he do it?"

"The snag is that most of them have been in the forefront of the trouble. And one of them is Pat Meaghan."

"He's a vindictive beast," said Mr. Behrens. "He won't pass up a chance like this."

"Yes, Miss Varney?" said the Rector, managing to combine in his tones hostility toward a known rebel and a degree of warmth appropriate to the daughter of a possible benefactor.

"It's about Pat Meaghan and the others."

"Which others?"

"The ones who've been buying cannabis, the silly asses."

"I should have used a stronger term myself," said the Rector. "What they have done happens to be a criminal offense."

"Only if you make it so," said Alison. "I gather the police will only push it if you make them."

"Might I ask exactly how you have—er—gathered all this, Miss Varney? So far as I was aware the whole matter was, at the moment, entirely confidential between me and the Home Office man who unearthed this scandalous affair."

"These things get about," said Alison evasively. "The point is, are you prepared to make a deal?"

"A deal?"

"If you'll persuade the police to back-pedal on these charges, I'll guarantee you'll have no more trouble at the College. At least, as long as I'm here."

The Rector had gone very red. He said, "Do you imagine for a moment that I could contemplate an outrageous bargain of that sort?"

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"I don't suppose you want a lot of trouble when the Minister comes down to open the Library wing next week, do you? He might get the idea that you weren't doing a very good job."

"I fear you misjudge me," said the Rector. His mouth was so tight that the words would hardly come out. "If I had been in any doubt before as to my proper course, this impudent attempt at blackmail and bribery would have made my mind up for me. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a great many things to do."

"We're on collision course," said Mr. Behrens.

"She sounds a remarkable girl," said Mr. Calder.

They were taking tea in the Palm Court of the hotel where Mr. Calder was staying. A string quartet was playing a sedate selection from the Arcadians.

"Oh, she is—an arresting personality. Her father's a millionaire. She's a dedicated radical extremist, but with a lot more brains than that sort of person usually has. Make *her* Rector and you'd have a University worth talking about."

"It sounds to me as if you've fallen for her."

"I have," said Mr. Behrens. "Hook, line, and sinker. Incidentally, she placed me without any difficulty."

"The devil she did! What happened?"

"She offered to withdraw Ahmed from the leadership of the Student Protest Group, on conditions."

"Which were?"

"That I took his place. Even to achieve our main objective I didn't feel I could agree to that."

A string quartet was inducing a mood of nostalgia in Mr. Behrens. They were playing one of the tunes from the second act. *It's nice and fine. I think that we shall have a lovely day—Eighty in the shade they say—very, very warm for May.* Mr. Behrens was humming the words to himself when he realized that Mr. Calder had said something.

"What's that about Ahmed?"

"I said, you won't have to bother any more about Ahmed. His father's ordered him to come home."

"Ordered him home?"

"Nothing to do with the University. The decision was taken on grounds of policy."

"When did you hear?"

"About an hour ago."

"Policy? What policy? Look here, something's up. Why wasn't I told?"

"I've been trying to make up

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my mind," said Mr. Calder calmly, "whether I'd tell you at all. Since it's going to make you very angry I thought I'd let you finish your tea first."

"First we lose Pat, and most of the out-and-outers with him. *They* daren't move hand or foot until the court case is decided. And now Ahmed. Damn, damn, *damn.*"

It was the first time Mr. Behrens had seen Alison close to tears. He said, "I think it's time I gave you my well-known lecture on tactics. You made a mistake in offering the Rector terms. Never do that when your opponent thinks he's winning. The time for offering terms is when *you're* winning."

"I'm sorry, I don't see—"

"When you have suffered a series of setbacks, when your front is pushed in, your flanks are under fire, and your rear is threatened, there's only one thing to do. Attack. Most of the students are behind you. They all realize that the Rector is behaving vindictively. He's never been more unpopular than at this moment. The newsmen will be here in force when the Minister comes down on Wednesday. You've got a golden opportunity to show the world what you think of him."

"It's all very well talking. Do you realize that almost every effective member of our organization is out of action? You can't build a new committee in forty-eight hours."

Mr. Behrens seemed not to have heard her. He said, "The speeches will take place in the assembly hall. There is some sort of loft above the dais. The ceiling, I noticed, is wood or plaster board. A trap door cut at the right point—"

"I could think up a lot of marvelous ideas," said Alison, "if we had the people and the equipment. For one thing, do you realize that the assembly hall is locked at night?"

"I have a friend who happens to be staying in Wallingford," said Mr. Behrens. "He has a way with locks. He could also get hold of any equipment, within reason, that you want."

"Why should he help? Why should you, come to that?"

"We're both *very* angry with the Rector," said Mr. Behrens gently. "When we're angry we like to do something about it."

Mr. Fortescue looked over the top of his steel-rimmed glasses and said, in tones of cold disapproval, "Do I gather, Behrens, that you had a hand in this disgraceful episode?"

"I organized it," said Mr. Behrens, "with a little help from Calder."

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"Suppose you are implicated?"

"Not a chance."

"I'm glad you had that much sense." Mr. Fortescue resumed his study of the report. "I see that the newspapers speak of an avalanche of soot descending on the Rector *and* on the Minister."

"It was soot mixed with flour, actually. It gave them a very odd appearance."

"Like the black and white minstrels," said Mr. Calder.

"Suppose this girl—Alison Varney—is charged with complicity and gives you away?"

"Not a shred of evidence against her. She was seated in the third row of the audience and could not possibly have had any hand in opening the trap door."

"She didn't throw tomatoes, either," said Mr. Calder.

"Tomatoes," said Mr. Fortescue. "There was no mention in the paper of tomatoes."

"About twenty of the students threw them. Oddly enough, they were students who hadn't been particularly militant before."

Mr. Fortescue seemed to be visualizing the scene. He said, "Soot, flour, *and* tomatoes. The Minister is a man who is rather conscious of his personal dignity. I can't think he was pleased."

"He was far from pleased," said Mr. Behrens. "And spent, I believe, the best part of half an hour telling the Rector exactly what he thought of him and of his lack of control over his students. The betting is strongly in favor of a new Rector being appointed."

"I have noticed," said Mr. Fortescue, "that when you speak of the Rector, Behrens, you exhibit a most uncharacteristic spirit of vindictiveness."

"You know *how* he got rid of Ahmed?"

"I wasn't exactly clear about it," said Mr. Fortescue. "I was so relieved that he had left without embarrassment of ourselves that I didn't inquire too closely into the means."

"The Rector had a message conveyed to Ahmed's father," said Mr. Calder, "that his son was in danger of being debauched by a Jewish girl."

"My personal opinion," said Mr. Behrens, "is that he was lucky to get off with soot and tomatoes. He deserved boiling lead."

Mr. Fortescue rocked silently on his chair for some seconds. His eyes had a far-away look. Then he said, "The experiment was tried, in the early twenties, in a Rectorial election at Aberdeen University. It was not an unqualified success."

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a *NEW* crime story by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

Joe Gunnarson, who was a foreman at J. F. Guernsey's dried-fruit and dehydrated-vegetables plant, had troubles. Big ones. His son, his wife, his brother. And then there was that mysterious business of what was happening on the new part of the road that ran through the valley. . .

THE MAD SNIPER

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

For two years the road through the valley had been in the making, and it had killed a man for each year. The first had been a construction employee whose piece of heavy equipment had toppled over on him. The second had defied the world to remove him from the house where he'd lived for 50 years—a traditional bit of Americana, complete with shotgun, rockingchair vigil, and photographers; but the old man had died of a heart attack before the deputies could lob in their first teargas shells.

But now, as Joe Gunnarson drove along the almost-finished road in the earliest dusk, he thought very little of the road and its history. There would be plenty of time for that. Time to reflect how the road would take him straight from home to work and straight back again, without delays at traffic lights, railroad crossings, or repairs—the old road was always being repaired, it had seemed. Time to reflect on who had lived where, but didn't any more because the new road ran right through the old homesites. And time to compare the disadvantage that he had to leave his car at the foot of the hill and climb up to his house with the advantage that on the old road he could park almost in his front yard.

Right now Joe Gunnarson was thinking about his troubles. The first was his little son,

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Jody, who had been sick when Joe left home this morning and who was almost certain to be sick when he got back: a pale, whining sort of child, who had inherited his face from his father but not, it seemed, his father's health. It was too bad he hadn't got his mother's looks instead of her metabolism. For Ella was trouble Number Two.

"Oh, leave me alone, Joe," she would say. "Bad enough I could hardly drag myself out of bed this morning"—retreating from Joe's comforting touch—"but the kid was crying the whole damned day. And as if *that* wasn't enough, your rotten brother—"

Was trouble Number Three. All his troubles were people, and the same ones all the time. Joe had a good job, his own health was vigorous. If only his wife and child were in better shape. If only his wife and brother got along together. Because Keith and Ella were at each another all the time, it seemed. Ideally Keith should be living somewhere else. But that was out of the question: he had no job, claimed (and it sounded reasonable) that he couldn't get one because, who knows?—he might be drafted.

So Keith slept late—which annoyed Ella; he sloped around the county in his old car that Joe had financed—which burned Ella up; and he came home as it pleased him, to eat big meals, for which, of course, he never paid—which enraged Ella.

"Let me alone, Joe. I said *NO!* Are you deaf? Do you know what that brother of yours said to me today?"

Joe sighed and the valley and hills grew darker and it was only with abrupt care that he kept from ramming into a car which had stopped on the road.

"My lord!" the man who belonged to the car kept saying. "My lord, I was shot at! Someone shot at me! Oh, my lord!" He was an ordinary man, middle-aged, in rumpled work clothes, and he had a Southwestern accent.

"Why would ennabodda wawnta do that to me? My lord, I was just drivin' aloeng and *peeng!*—there come that ol' bullet—right through *here*"—he put his finger through the hole—"an' hit right *here*—see that ol' dint? An' I heard it rattle around but now I cain't find it. Expect it might of fell out when I opened the door. Say, do you have a flashlight?"

Joe didn't. "Listen, what makes you sure it was a bullet? Couldn't it've been, say, a pebble that some car kicked up passing the other way?" Joe suggested.

The other man looked at

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him with an outraged expression that the shooting (if that was what it was) had failed to produce. "*Pebble?* Why, that wasn't no—now, you look here! No, never mind, you git aloeng about your own business. *I'm* goin' a drive in and *ree*port this to the Shurf. *Pebble! Oh*, my lord!"

Joe Gunnarson parked his car at the foot of the hill behind the house and climbed up the narrow path. Keith was lying on the floor in the living room, watching television. Ella poked at a pot on the stove, as if with intent to maim. Jody squatted in the doorway between the living room and the kitchen, sniffling.

"Funny thing happened as I was coming along the new part of the road," Joe said.

Keith said, "Ha, ha," his voice level, his face blank.

"You see, Joe? You see what I mean? That's how he is, only worse, the whole day long—fresh," moaned Ella. And little Jody kept reaching his hands for the piece of candy his father had brought "for after supper" until finally he spilled his milk. Joe pushed him back firmly and Jody began to cry.

"What do you want from the kid?" Keith asked. "He's hardly two years old. Get off his back, will you?" The little boy glared at his father. Joe sighed. After a minute he praised the supper (lying like a rug), but Ella just made an impatient noise. He went to bed early, but when he got up afterward, Keith was still on the living-room floor, smoking, watching the Late Late Show. And Ella, it turned out, was still in no better mood. Joe sighed again and went back to sleep.

Gunnarson worked for the J. F. Guernsey Corporation, an outfit which prepared and packaged dried fruit and dehydrated vegetables for manufacturers of other food products. It was a fairly small outfit—there were only four foremen, and Joe was one of them. In the row of big barnlike buildings Joe was happy and felt more at home than in his own house, though he didn't like to face that fact and pushed the thought away whenever it occurred to him.

"Funny thing happened to me last night when I was driving along the new part of the road," he said to the other foremen as they changed into their working clothes.

"Funny thing happened," he confided to the waitress at the lunchroom. It wasn't till he finished telling it to old Mr. Guernsey himself that a little voice between his ears said:

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Say, you're getting a lot of use out of this little incident. His face twisted as he had to admit it was true, and all he could think of in defense was to ask himself: Well, what else is there to talk about? They don't want to hear about my troubles. But it bothered him, so instead he started a conversation with the boss about cars.

"I see you got a last year's Chevy, just the same as mine, Mr. Guernsey," he said. "They sure get dusty—cars, I mean, about this time of year, and the whole road not all fixed yet. Why don't you get Manuel to give it a good cleanup?"

The old man pursed his mouth. "I *could* tell you that when I want your advice I'll ask for it," he began.

"Aw, now I—"

"But I know you mean well, Joe. So I'll just put it like this: at my age and in my position I can afford not to give a damn."

"Okay, Mr. G., I only—"

"If I want to spit on the floor, I spit on the floor. If I want to go without a tie, I go without a tie. And if I want to let my car get dusty, why, I *let* it get dusty."

"Okay, Mr. G., you're a hunderd percent right. Sorry I—"

"And now let's see the new onions that just came in." Mr. Guernsey closed the subject.

It wasn't till the day's work was finished that Joe gave another thought to the previous day's incident. It was in the shower that Bob La Motta, another foreman, mentioned it. Over the splashing and stomping and raucous yelling and singing Bob called over, "Hey, Joe! This old guy you were telling us about? Claim he had a *bullet* shot through his car and you claim, no, it was a pebble?"

Squeezing water out of his eyes, Joe yelled back, "I didn't say it *was* a pebble, I—"

" 'O Roe-za rosa Sanantone!' "

Gesturing to Bob that he couldn't hear what he was saying because of the noise, Joe finished his shower, dried, and dressed. La Motta came over and said, "So you were wrong, Joe. The deputies, they say it *was* a bullet."

Joe said that deputies had been known to be wrong before. Bob nodded sagely. *He* knew that. "But it happened again today. Lady from the city. Just driving along and—wham! Right through both back windows—a *bullet!* You can't mistake a bullethole in glass."

That was the second one.

The next day there were three more.

For the next two days the deputies scouted the hills to see

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who was—or who could be—sniping at cars on the road below. The answer as to who it could be was that it could be anybody. There were miles of road and many more miles of hills. But as to who actually was doing the sniping, they learned nothing.

For those two days and for two days after that nothing happened. And on the day after *that* someone fired six bullets into four different automobiles up and down the valley.

"Who in hell could be doing a thing like that?" Joe wondered aloud.

Ella had a prompt reply. "Some bum," she said. "The woods are full of them. They think the world owes them a living."

Keith swore. "Oh, get off my *back*, will ya?" he demanded.

"You going to let him talk to me like that?" Ella asked shrilly. And the battle was on again. Joe felt he'd had enough of it and made up his mind to ask Mr. Guernsey to find Keith a job even if it was uncertain how long he'd be able to hold it before he was drafted. No matter how low the pay, Joe would insist that his brother accept the job.

At least it would get him out of the house, give Ella a rest from quarreling with her brother-in-law, and let her pay more attention to the little boy. It would be nice to hear the kid laugh for a change instead of crying or whining. It was almost funny the way the same expression—pettish, annoyed, aggrieved—seemed to be on the faces of both uncle and nephew so much of the time, exaggerating the family resemblance between them.

"I think he must be a crackpot," Joe said, deliberately ignoring what had just passed between his wife and his brother. And the next day he wasn't surprised to see that the newspapers seemed to agree. Even the city newspapers had given it a three-column headline: *Who Is the Mad Sniper of the Valley?*

There were two uniformed deputies in the lunchroom one day during the week and Joe brought the matter up, asking them what they thought.

A thin sad-looking deputy said he thought maybe the papers were right. "Guy'd hafta be outa his mind to do a thing like that," he said. "He coulda killed somebody! I think it must be like they say, some poor fella like this here Mad Bomber back East that time, he figures he's got a kind of a grievance, and his mind snapped. Or maybe he was cracked

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all the time, only it took a nincident a some sort to bring it out inny open. If he'd only write a *note!* A *letter!* Then we could trap him like the Mad—"

The waitress pointed out that Jack the Ripper wrote enough notes to paper the walls at Scotland Yard, but they still never caught him. But the thin sad deputy said, "Yeah, well, but that was *years* ago, before the First World's War. Today—"

However, the other deputy, a heavier man with a small steady smile on his ruddy face, he didn't agree with his colleague or the papers.

"You want *my* opinion," he said, offering it without waiting to hear if it was wanted or not, "it's some punk kid. Nobuddy's doing it for revenge. If they was good enough ta hit the doggone ottamobiles, they'd be a good enough shot to of *killed* somebuddy by now. Right? No, it's some punk kid doing it for thrills, *my* opinion. Like playin' 'Chicken' with these hotrods. Prob'ly tryinna see how close they can git to hittin' the driver or the passenger without ackshly doin' it. Punk kids," he said, not stopping smiling. "Too soft onn'm. Otta bring back the wippin' post. Otta have one a them big ol' leather belts with brass studs in it. Git some a these punk kids," he said, smiling, "strip 'm down, an' git some blood out of 'm. Make 'm scream. Otta—"

But the waitress said he would make her scream in a minute, so would he please stop-pit? And the deputy, his smile neither larger nor smaller, said, "Why, sure."

Joe was about to ask Mr. Guernsey, after lunch, about a job for Keith, but the old man started talking first, and what was his theory? The same as the thin deputy's. Only Mr. G. had carried it a step further.

"Wouldn't be a bit surprised," he said, pinker than usual with the power of his idea, "but what it could be somebody who was kicked off his land when they put the new road through. Lot of people weren't a bit happy about that, you remember, Joe? Of course, in a way—now, don't get me wrong—but in a way you can't blame some of them. I'm not condoning violence, you understand. And we did need the new road—"

"We sure did," Joe said. "Before, I never knew if I was going to be late for work or not unless I started real early; or *when* I was going to get home. But now it's just like clockwork. Oh. Excuse me, Mr. G."

After a second the old man went on to say, "But it wasn't really fair the way they paid for it. They figured that every

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house of such-and-such a size is worth so much money. And that's all they'd *pay*. Didn't matter what improvements you'd put into the house—new paint, carpentry, plumbing, while your neighbor was letting his own place run down. No, same price for the both of you. So maybe somebody figured he was cheated and he got to brooding and now he's taking it out on just anyone who uses the new road."

Joe nodded slowly. "I wouldn't be surprised. You think you ought to tell the sheriff so maybe he could check up on everybody whose property was condemned for the new road?"

Old Mr. Guernsey's eyes and mouth grew o-shaped at the thought. "Do you suppose I really should, Joe?"

Joe's slow nod continued. "Well, I hate to be the cause of getting somebody into trouble, but—case like this? Yes. I really think so, uh huh."

And so he forgot all about asking about a job for Keith.

The next morning he got to work to find the place all excited, and the sheriff's officers' cars in the yard. "Burglary," Bob La Motta told him. "Broke into the office and smashed the cashbox, rifled the desks, stole a couple of typewriters and a radio and an adding machine and I don't know what else."

They heard old Mr. G. saying to the deputies loudly and sort of upset, "Of *course* I have ideas who did it. You really want to hear them or you going to give me the brush-off the way you did yesterday when I told you my ideas about the Mad Sniper?"

At this Joe immediately quit hanging around and summoned his men to work. If the boss had followed his advice and the result was that the boss was only embarrassed and made to look like a fool—why, then Joe didn't want to call any more attention to himself than he had to. He fell to on the peach-drying detail. Too bad, and it still seemed like a sound idea. However—

However, the solution to the burglary didn't take the sheriff's deputies very long, and this tended to diminish somewhat the value of the ex-homeowner's revenge theory in Joe's mind.

Not long before lunch, Manuel, the porter, buzzed up to the second floor on which the sulfur rooms were located and came over to Joe and his crew, very excited. "They caught 'im! The burglar! And you'll never guess who it was. Go ahead, guess."

"Miss Ponsonby?" someone

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offered, raising a laugh. Miss Ponsonby, who still wore a shirtwaist with a watch pinned to it, had been with the outfit as long as its founder, and was a model of all possible rectitude.

"No!" said Manuel disgustedly. "What're you, crazy? Miss Ponsonby! No—well, you wouldn't guess, so I'll tell you. It was Ray!"

This was certainly a surprise. Ray, the bookkeeper, a quiet young man who lived with his mother and played the organ in church. It was almost as unbelievable as if it had been Miss Ponsonby.

Manuel, his round face lit up by his news, explained. It seemed that Ray had been stealing money from the firm "all along." Why? No one knew exactly—at least, Manuel didn't know exactly—although several ribald and rather unlikely explanations were put forward by Joe's crew. The boss had caught him and had made him sign a confession.

He said to Ray, "I haven't made up my mind yet what I'll do."

The matter, not unnaturally, had preyed on Ray's mind, and he finally made up *his* mind what to do: steal the signed confession, quit his job, and deny everything he had admitted about his original crime.

Glancing into the sulfur room to see how the peaches were drying, Joe half asked and half suggested, "So he figured that while he was at it he might as well take the typewriters, the radio, and the other stuff."

But, according to Manuel, this wasn't just the way it was. "Ray said he figgered like this: If all he stole was the dockiment, they'd right away know who it was, see. So he figgered like this: If I steal alotta *other* stuff, they'll think it was a *real* burglary and so they won't suspeck *me*. See? He figgered like this—"

However poor Ray had figured, it threw his employer off the trail only long enough for him to discover the missing confession—which was, after all, an item most unlikely for any "real burglar" to have bothered with. And Mr. G. told his suspicion to the deputies, who (this time) listened. And Ray, jerked back into the *real* real world as soon as the uniforms confronted him, admitted All. He was now down at the jail, and so was the boss.

"He gunna press charges?"

"He say he hasn't made up his mind what to do yet."

Mr. Guernsey was reported to have remained in doubt all afternoon, and then decided it was his duty to discuss the matter with Ray's mother. Just a few minutes before quitting

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time he took off in his dusty car and headed down the valley for the home shared by Ray and his mother.

In the shower Bob La Motta asked Joe if he heard the latest about the Mad Sniper. "Whoever's car gits hit with a silver bullet is intitled to a free ticket to a vampire movie!"

Joe's mind was full of thoughts as he drove home in the thickening blue dusk. So once again he almost missed observing a car by the side of the road—only this time someone was waving a flashlight. And this time he knew whose car it was.

"Keep moving, buddy, just keep on—I said, keep moving!"

"But that's my boss's car, Mr. Guernsey's, isn't it? He all right?"

The light was flashed in his eyes and stayed in his eyes. Joe, even before shading them, had recognized the voice of the heavy deputy and could imagine the smile. Then the light went back to the road.

"No, he ain't all right. He's dead. One a them bullets got 'im. You work for 'm, huh? What's *your* name?" He talked right on through Joe's cry of shock. A siren sounded. Another sheriff's car, light blinking rapidly and redly, came speeding down the road.

The old man lay fallen forward. Joe couldn't see his face. He felt this was just as well. "Bound to happen," said the thin sad deputy. "Sooner or later, you keep shooting at cars, you bound to kill somebody."

An idea sprang fully formed into Joe's mind, and without realizing, he began to think it out, aloud. "Suppose it wasn't an accident," he said. "Suppose a man wanted to kill a particular person, but he wasn't in a hurry. Suppose he wanted to cover his tracks in advance. Couldn't he start shooting at cars, not to hit anybody, but just to get across the idea that somebody—a maniac, maybe—was shooting at random? And then, when he *did* kill the man he wanted to, maybe then everybody *would* think it was an accident. Isn't that possible?"

No one made an answer. "But who," Joe cried, feeling genuine grief at the old man's death, unaware that he was asking the traditional, almost the ritual question—"Who would want to kill old Mr. Guernsey?"

In the headlights he could now see the half smile on the heavy deputy's face. "Not that sissy who was stealing from him, that's for sure," the officer said. "Besides, he's in jail. *You*

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worked for him—the old man have a girl friend on the side?"

Angrily Joe snapped, "He's a married man!"—then the sense of tense hit him—*was* a married man. Old Mrs. Guernsey, sweet and slow and childless—and tears formed in Joe's eyes.

The red-faced deputy snorted. "He's a married man! Buddy, you otta git wise! What's that gotta do with the Grand Army? Well, never mind, we'll find out. You better git movin'. We don't want no traffic block here. Come on, *come* on—"

Joe drove off. By and by he stopped seeing the road, except through a mist, half of grief, half of anger. He parked at the foot of the hill, knowing it was done clumsily, but not caring. He floundered his way up the path and threw open the door, aware that tears were running down his cheeks.

Ella and Keith were there, as usual, and he didn't know which one cried out first at seeing him come in, weeping. He felt half ashamed at feeling gratified that they were both so obviously upset at seeing him that way. They love me after all, he thought, moving forward and trying to smile at them to show he was really all right. Despite what they act like most of the time, they really love me.

It was a quick thought. It was replaced almost at once by another. What is the rifle doing in the kitchen where the baby can get at it? he was about to say. But then Keith got up, running, and he heard Ella scream at him, "You said he was dead! You said he was dead!"

And Joe looked at his wife's face and he looked at his brother's face and he understood what she meant and he understood everything that had happened and had been happening for quite some time.

But he didn't stand still as the understanding hit him. He moved, moved quickly, beating both Keith and Ella to the rifle, which was quite the worst piece of luck Keith and Ella had ever had.

"O"

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a NEW Inspector Cockrill story by

CHRISTIANNA BRAND

Once again you will find yourself standing invisibly at the side of Inspector Cockrill, or behind him, watching what he does, hearing what he says, as he investigates a murder on the scene of the crime. Once again you have the opportunity to match wits with the cocky little Cockrill . . .

THE LAST SHORT STORY

by CHRISTIANNA BRAND

It was midnight. The Chief Inspector delivered the usual caution. He exchanged glances with Detective Inspector Cockrill and added, "But there's no hurry. You can do it in the morning if you'd rather." They didn't want Counsel claiming later that they'd browbeaten the boy into making a statement when he was hysterical and worn-out.

But there was no fight left in him. "Give me the pen," he said. "I'll write it down. I'd rather. I'm used to writing things." He headed it: "One short story of mine that *will* get published. Only, posthumously, I suppose." In those days there was still the death penalty.

But in fact it would appear before sentence was carried out: why else *should* sentence be carried out?

I wanted to marry Pam (the statement read). I had no money. Pam said, by way of a joke, "You'll have to murder your rich Aunt Ellen." I said, "Yes, and let Cousin Peter swing for it—if he did, I'd scoop the lot." We went on discussing it. We pretended it was a joke long after it had ceased to be one.

Pam was in it with me, but she didn't murder my aunt. She was miles away at the time. All she did was to say what I'd told her to, over the telephone.

My cousin Peter and I had adjoining flats—bed-sitts they are, really, but they're called service flats. The walls are as

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thin as paper. I could hear Peter's typewriter pecking away from dawn to dusk. He hasn't done much better with his writing than I have, but God knows it hasn't been for his want of working: peck, peck, peck with two fingers on that damn typewriter—it used to send me mad. But at least when the day came, it meant that any time up to six o'clock he would be there in his flat, without an alibi.

I had asked Aunt Ellen to ring me up at four and being Aunt Ellen she rang at exactly four. So our Mrs. Jones, who does for Peter and me, was there to hear me say that I'd go round to Aunt Ellen's house for tea at five thirty. "Would you mind if I make it just a bit later, Aunt Nell? I'm working on a short story for the *Black Tulip* magazine. I promised I'd get it done today. If I could have another clear hour at it, I could finish it and drop it off on my way to you."

The story had been finished three days ago, actually, the last paragraphs cooked up to look a bit careless as though I'd dashed them off in an increasing hurry before I rushed off to my tea date. I motioned to Mrs. Jones, standing hatted and coated, to wait for her money and as soon as Aunt Ellen stopped talking, I put the receiver down, unobtrusively, on the table instead of hanging up, and fished for the three half crowns. "Thanks awfully, Mrs. Jones. See you next week then?"

If I didn't get the chance to put the receiver back before the police came milling around, there'd be Mrs. Jones to testify that at the time of Aunt Ellen's call I'd had my attention diverted and might well have failed to replace it properly. It was a little thing but I'd thought of even that.

So now nobody could telephone me while I was out of the flat. I wasn't afraid of people calling in person; both Peter and I have trained our friends, and each other, not to interrupt us during the day—we refuse to answer our doorbells between nine and six. But anyone might phone and I couldn't have someone giving evidence that, through the thin walls, he'd heard my phone ringing and ringing and had not heard me answering it.

Mrs. Jones had brought back our shoes from the cobbler's. I knew she would put Peter's in the locker outside his door, without disturbing him; we had Mrs. Jones well trained, too. I nipped out and got them and put them on. They were a bit tight, but wearable. I put a pair of my own shoes in the pockets of my macintosh—I mustn't be

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found wearing Peter's.

I would chuck his shoes in the river as I came away; but prints would be found on the scene of the crime of a recently mended sole and with luck the cobbler would recognize his work, and Peter wouldn't be able to produce his shoes. Not that I relied that much on the prints. I used Peter's shoes because I couldn't risk leaving prints of my own. The real proof against him was to come from the ashtray clue.

Some time ago Aunt Ellen suddenly announced that both of us must give up smoking—a nasty, dangerous habit and one she was quite sure neither of us should risk. I had no intention of giving up smoking for her or anyone, but of course I gave her my word. Not so, honest Peter. "It's no go, Aunt Nell," he said; "I could promise till I was blue in the face but I know I'd never stick to it—the minute your back was turned I'd be puffing away like a chimney, I know I would."

For a moment I thought he'd gone too far. She looked at him and she looked at me. She looked at me for a long time as though she expected me to say something, but to this day I don't know what—I'd given my solemn promise, what more was there to say? She waited and I waited. And then, suddenly, one of her right-about turns and she was laughing and saying that, well, that's candid anyway, and no doubt she was just a tiresome old lady full of crinks and cranks that nobody takes any notice of; and from then on, the place was covered with horrid little ashtrays, whenever we go to see her, and jokes about ashes being good for the carpets, till I could almost scream.

But that's Peter for you! Out he comes, blurting refusals and denials and confessions, with his air of innocence and downrightness, and he gets away with it time after time. I remember thinking so then. I remember thinking, He could get away with murder! It gave me a sort of savage pleasure that he was going to have to try. Not that I had anything against him—he's a sweet chap, really, would do anything for anybody; though all his damned honesty does get on one's nerves a bit.

The next time we were there together, I brought away one of the ashtrays. There were so many of them that one wouldn't be missed—or if it was, Aunt Ellen wouldn't be alive to tell the tale. I wrapped it up in a handkerchief, complete with Peter's cigarette ashes and Peter's cigarette ends and Peter's fingerprints. Of

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course there would be no ashtray used by *me*; I didn't smoke any more—not at Aunt Ellen's house anyway.

A quarter past four. I got out the ashtray; but the stuff in it smelled a bit stale and who knows what the police can find out in their scientific tests these days? So I filled it with today's stubs from a couple he'd smoked in my room at lunchtime and some fresh ashes. The fingerprints, of course, I cherished carefully, wrapping it all up in the handkerchief again and stowing it away in the pocket of my mac. I put on the mac and a soft hat and a pair of gloves; it was cold enough outside to warrant them. I patted the pockets to see that I had my own shoes. Then I sat deliberately down in a chair and thought it all over, detail by detail.

Peter or me. That was all it boiled down to—Peter or me. Same motive—the need for money. Same testimony—he working in his flat, I in mine. Neither of us with proof—he with no telephone, I with mine (accidentally) cut off. Neither of us answering the doorbell. Same lack of alibi—no one to prove that either of us had positively not been out.

Peter and me—two young men of about the same height and build, possessing hats and macs much the same in color and shape—just in case I should be noticed near that lonely house on that misty evening. I'd bought a special mac, unidentifiable, in case it should get bloodstained; if that happened I should have to get rid of it.

Peter and me—nothing to choose between us as suspects for the murder of our rich Aunt Ellen. But footprints found in the garden might be identified as his and fingerprints found on a newly used ashtray most certainly would be identified as his. *And* my alibi for the actual time of the murder.

Aunt Ellen was surprised that I got there so early—twenty to five. I said that I hadn't stopped to deliver the story after all, that I still had it in an envelope under my arm. She went on into the drawing room. I excused myself and ran upstairs, still with my gloves on. I got dear departed Uncle George's old revolver—she'd kept it on the landing, ready-loaded against burglars, since she lived there alone—she was a gutsy old girl. I then went back to the drawing room and, giving myself no time to think, I shot her between the eyes.

She looked more surprised than ever and it seemed a long time before she died, but I daresay it wasn't really. My head went a bit muzzy. I

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dropped the gun down beside her and I remember making a sort of brushing movement down the front of my macintosh and being pleased that there was no blood on it, after all.

But then my head cleared. I got out the ashtray, put it on the table, and arranged in it the butts from Peter's cigarettes, stubbed out the way he stubs out cigarettes—after all, he'd smoked them himself. I took the receiver off the telephone and left it dangling. I arranged a nice footprint, not too obvious, in the rose bed outside the window, as I left. I went down to the river and changed into my own shoes and weighted Peter's with stones and threw them in.

I checked again for blood but there was none on me. I checked my hat, my coat, the buttons on my coat, my handkerchief—all the things that other murderers seem to strew so liberally about them. All present and correct. I set fire to the ashy handkerchief and ground the remnants into the mud. I settled the enevelope under my arm and not risking a bus I walked quickly to the offices of the *Black Tulip*.

The fiction editor looked rather less than delighted when I produced the short story. "*Did* you promise me one?"

"Well, I like that," I said. "I've sweated blood getting it done by your deadline and made myself late for tea with my Aunt Ellen to boot." I picked up the telephone from his desk. "I'll give her a buzz, if you don't mind. It's worth my inheritance for me to just turn up with, 'Sorry I'm late, old girl.' "

"Okay," he said, going back to his work. "Help yourself."

I dialed Pam's number—you can't trace numbers on our dial system. She gave me the signal that it was all right at her end and to go into the act. "Aunt Ellen?" I said. She duly went into the act and I must say she did me proud. She knew by then that I must have done it, and I think she was frightened, so she sounded a bit hysterical and that helped. I kept saying, "What? What? *What*?" and after a bit I said to the editor, "Hey, listen to this."

"What is it?" he said.

"I can't quite make it out," I said. "It's my Aunt Ellen. Something about—someone coming downstairs or something. Something about a—*gun*?" I held the receiver so that he could listen, too. At the other end, on the word "gun," Pam threw a book on the floor with a bang and gave a sort of chopped-off scream, very effective. I'd told her to wait half a

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minute and then put the receiver back. We didn't want the editor's office staff getting too nosey; I think you can trace a call if the receiver is off.

He'd gone a bit white. "It sounds as if—"

"I'm going over there," I said. I started to leg it out of the door. "The address—what is the address?" he called after me; "I'll ring the police." I yelled back the address as I pelted off down the stairs.

The police arrived before me but that was all right, too. I hung around while they argued over the time of death but they never can be certain within half an hour or so—and they spotted the footprints and the ground-out cigarettes and the finger-prints. I went back with them to Peter's flat and stayed with him, all solicitous. They hauled him off to the station "for further questioning." They "thought he might be able to help them." So did I.

It's fascinating to lay things on and then sit back and watch people behaving just as you'd planned for them to do. Even the police—they seemed almost helpless, as though they simply must move to the clockwork pattern set for them. Sending for Mrs. Jones, asking about Peter's shoes, getting in touch with the cobbler; checking which brand of cigarettes Peter smoked, how far down he smoked them, whether he ground them out in the ashtray in any special way. I'd meant them to do all the things they did, and they proceeded to do them. It made me feel a little like God.

And then moving through into my place. It was Inspector Cockrill who stayed behind for that. My newly mended shoes were safely on my feet—no mud from Aunt Ellen's flowerbeds on them. And my clothes all present and correct and my lovely watertight alibi. After all, I'd been standing there in the editor's office while Aunt Ellen practically described her last moments, blow by blow.

Inspector Cockrill noticed my telephone receiver not properly on its hook. Mrs. Jones went into her clockwork act also, bearing out all I had said.

"I see," said Inspector Cockrill. "The young gentleman was speaking to his aunt about coming to tea with her and he more or less interrupted the conversation to speak to you. Right? And then he forgot to replace the receiver. Right?"

"Unless he rang somebody afterwards," said Mrs. Jones.

"Well, no, I didn't," I said. "I must have failed to notice that I hadn't put it back properly."

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"I see," the Inspector said again.

And then the clockwork began to break down.

He sent Mrs. Jones away and made a come-hither sign to his sergeant, and his sergeant came hither, which is to say unpleasantly close to me.

"The fact is then," said Inspector Cockrill, "that the phone call you made from the *Black Tulip* office was a fake."

So now it's midnight and Peter's gone home and it's me that's at the station "for further questioning." I fought for a bit but now they've got Pam talking and, anyway, I'm sick of it all.

So here's my last short story and if it gets published you'll know what's happened to me. I want to ask Inspector Cockrill just one question and then I'll sign the statement and be done.

The young man put down the pen and lifted his haggard face. Inspector Cockrill, unsmiling, gathered together the sheets, bunched them tidily, and handed them to the Chief Inspector. Standing like two choir boys together, they quietly and unhurriedly read the statement through.

"Okay," said Cockrill.

He answered the question and then handed the pages back to the young man who read them through once. The young man initialed each page. At the end he added, "I see. It couldn't have been Aunt Ellen's house I was speaking to from the magazine office. I'd been through to her earlier and failed to put my receiver back. If you're through to a number and don't replace your own receiver, then nobody else can get through to that number until you do replace your receiver. I hadn't known that."

The young man then signed his name at the end of the statement.

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introducing a brand-new character

ULYSSES S. BYRD, con man

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Stories about con men seem to have a special appeal. Who can forget the exploits and escapades of O. Henry's gentle Jeff Peters and of George Randolph Chester's get-rich-quick Wallingford, and recently in EQMM, of Robert Edward Eckels' L-and-L boys, Lang and Lovell and their lovely art forgeries?

So it is always a pleasure to welcome a new member to the Con Club. Meet the elusive, shadowy Ulysses S. Byrd, a master of misdirection, a confidence man we'll be hearing more of in issues to come . . .

MEET ULYSSES S. BYRD:
The Million-Dollar Jewel Caper

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"His name is Ulysses S. Byrd," Dr. Hagger said. "He's a very clever confidence man."

Samuel Longman blinked his eyes. "A what?"

"A con man, a swindler."

"And you say you saw him in this hotel?"

Dr. Hagger nodded. "There's no mistake about it. I was sitting right in this chair and he walked across the lobby yesterday afternoon. Almost looked as if he was—what do they call it?—casing the place."

Samuel Longman carefully unwrapped a fresh cigar. "Really, Doctor, I'm quite surprised. A con man, you say. And in this hotel. By the way, what did you say your line is?"

"Back in Chicago I'm the Assistant Medical Examiner. I've spent a good many days in court and seen a good many

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criminals. There's no mistaking Ulysses S. Byrd. He's a tall fellow, rather attractive to the ladies, dark hair, in his early thirties. We had him in jail once in Chicago, but a smart lawyer got him out."

Longman nodded, digesting this information. It meant nothing to him at present, but he'd learned early in life that knowledge was the best defense against his enemies. "If you see him again, I'd appreciate your pointing him out to me."

Dr. Hagger nodded. "The convention only lasts till Saturday, but if he turns up today or tomorrow I'll show him to you. Even introduce you, if you'd like."

"No, thanks." Samuel Longman signed the check before the graying doctor could reach it. "I'm going up to my room now, but it was a pleasure talking with you. Maybe we could have dinner tomorrow, if you get free of the convention crowd."

Hagger made a face. "Nothing I'd like better. Those guys spend most of their time arguing about fees and government controls and malpractice suits. Doesn't leave much time for medicine."

"Very good. Suppose I look for you down here around six."

They shook hands, and Samuel Longman made his way to the elevator, stopping only long enough to pick up a late-afternoon newspaper with the final stock-market quotations.

Helen was waiting for him in their tenth-floor suite, dressed for the evening and obviously impatient. "Where've you been all this time?" she demanded. "Am I supposed to sit here twiddling my thumbs while you're chasing around downstairs?"

Helen was young, beautiful, and bossy. She was a lovely little package containing all the joys and frustrations one usually encountered in second wives—especially when the husband was 26 years older. "Calm down," he said. "I have to think."

"About what?"

"I had a drink with one of the doctors at the convention—fellow named Hagger that I met down in the lobby. He says he saw Ulysses Byrd in the hotel yesterday."

"Byrd? Do I know him?"

"You sure as hell should. He's the con man who was behind that attempt to defraud the trucking company last year. If he's been in this hotel he may be trying to take another shot at me."

"I thought you were finished with the racket, Sammy. I thought we were just retired

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people living in a suite on Central Park South and enjoying life."

"We are retired—or I am, at least. You're too young to retire, and you never worked anyway. This has nothing to do with the racket, doll. This is strictly a guy who might be after my money."

"What's he look like?"

"The doc says he's tall and good-looking. I never met him myself."

"He sounds nice."

"Sure he sounds nice, but you won't think he's so nice if he gets his hands on all that jewelry of yours sitting downstairs in the hotel safe-deposit box."

"How could he do that, Sammy?"

Longman walked to the window and stood gazing out at Central Park, barren and white after a rare March snowfall. "He can't, if we keep our wits about us. I just hope that doc gets a chance to point him out to me. I like to know what my enemy looks like."

Ulysses S. Byrd, who was neither quite so young nor quite so handsome as people liked to think, stepped off the elevator at the top of the RCA Building and entered the cocktail lounge adjoining the Rainbow Grill. There, seated at a dim table overlooking the skyline to the south, he found Ronny Spangle, the man he'd come to see.

Spangle got to his feet as Byrd approached and held out a hand. His palm was damp and his grip uncertain. "Good to see you again, Byrd. No hard feelings about Chicago, huh?"

"If there were hard feelings I wouldn't be meeting you here, would I?"

"Sure. I just thought I'd mention it, that's all. What're you drinking?"

"Scotch."

Spangle spoke to the waiter and then turned his attention back to Byrd. "So what can I do for you?"

"I need some help," Byrd said.

"Help? The way I hear it, help's the last thing in the world you need. Is it true you conned Colonel Withers out of a race horse last fall, then entered him in a claiming race and walked off with a profit of twenty grand?"

"Something like that," Byrd admitted. "I had the breaks."

Ronny Spangle sipped his drink. "You said you needed help."

"I need some boys for a job."

"A con?"

Byrd shook his head. "I can't work this with a con. It's

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got to be a rip-off, with guns."

Spangle glanced around nervously. "Hell, I don't know."

"You did it in Chicago with the Zambini brothers. You did it to me, in fact, in case you've forgotten."

"Sure, but that was business. You were pulling a con and we just wanted our share."

"So, this is business, too. And you'll get your share."

Ronny Spangle thought about it, making wet circles on the table with the bottom of his glass. Finally he looked up and said, "What do you want hit?"

"Remember Samuel Longman?"

"The trucking racket? The guy who swindled the teamsters out of a cool million?"

"That's the one. He's married again, to some young chick. They're living at a hotel on Central Park South when they're not busy traveling in Europe. They say he put most of his cash into jewelry for her, to keep it out of the government's hands in case they started checking his bank accounts."

Spangle chewed at his lower lip. "What's wrong with Swiss banks?"

"He doesn't trust them after that Howard Hughes business. It's all in diamonds and fancy jewelry. His wife never wears most of it, but it's there."

"Where?"

"In the hotel safe-deposit box. Maybe the whole million."

"Which hotel?"

"The Park Central."

Ronny Spangle whistled softly. "That's class."

"No more so than the other hotels that have been knocked off recently."

"They caught those other guys."

"They won't catch you, because I'll personally take the stuff off your hands."

"I don't know. How many men would we need?"

"Three inside and one outside. I could be the outside man if you wanted."

"Three."

"You could get the Zambini brothers again."

"Yeah, I suppose so. Do you know which box is Longman's?"

"I'll find out," Byrd promised. "Suppose you meet me at the Park Central tomorrow and we'll look over the place together. There's a convention of doctors at the hotel right now, so they'll never notice two extra people hanging around."

"Good," Spangle agreed. "Want another drink?"

Byrd shook his head. "It fogs the brain when I'm on a job."

The following day was

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Friday, and Samuel Longman came down early from his suite. Helen had gone off for her weekly hair appointment, leaving him to unaccustomed loneliness. It was on days like this, with the hours hanging heavy over him, that he most regretted his decision to retire from the trucking business.

The decision, of course, had not been entirely voluntary. Things were closing in during those last few months, with rumors of grand jury investigations and rumblings out of Washington. It had seemed wise to announce his retirement and go off to parts unknown with a beautiful young wife and a great deal of money. Now, perhaps, it was time to consider a return to business.

"There you are," Dr. Hagger said, coming up behind him. "Had lunch yet?" It was already after two o'clock.

"No, as a matter of fact. But I thought our date was for dinner."

"Those speeches!" Hagger grimaced. "I had to get away from them. I'm beginning to wish I'd brought my wife, and at least we could have gone out on the town."

"There's not that much to see in the winter," Longman said. "New York's just a big Chicago."

The gray-haired doctor snorted. "Come on, I owe you a drink from yesterday."

They had just seated themselves at a table in the lounge when Hagger whispered, "There's Byrd again."

"Where?" Longman looked around, searching the crowd in the lobby.

"You just missed him, but he was with that young fellow in the checked jacket."

Longman focused his eyes and inhaled sharply. "I know him. Name's Ronny Spangle. A bad customer. A stickup man. What in hell is he doing here with Byrd?"

Dr. Hagger shrugged. "There have been a number of hotel robberies in Manhattan recently. Maybe they're planning to hold up this place."

Longman pondered that possibility. "Byrd could still be after my money, I suppose."

"What?"

"Nothing. Just thinking out loud. Can you still see Spangle? Where's he going?"

"To the cashier's window."

"Damn! He's casing the hotel safe-deposit boxes."

"Maybe not," the doctor said soothingly. "Perhaps he's only getting change for the telephone."

But Longman was twisted around in his chair, watching the man at the cashier's window. When Ronny Spangle

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finally moved away and headed for the street door, Samuel Longman rose, the drink forgotten, and headed for the cashier's window.

"Can I help you, sir?" the moon-faced woman asked.

"That man who was just here—I think I know him. Can you tell me who he is?"

"He didn't give his name. He was asking about using one of our safe-deposit boxes. I explained that they were only for residents and guests of the hotel."

"I see."

"He did say he may be checking in and taking a box, though. He seemed quite interested in the hours we're on duty. Of course I told him he could get into the box at any time. That's one advantage we have over banks."

"Yes, it is," Longman agreed.

He went back to the table in the lounge and sat down opposite Dr. Hagger. "I was right. Spangle was casing the safe-deposit boxes."

Hagger was immediately concerned. "You're white as a sheet. Anything wrong?"

"I have a great deal of valuable jewelry in my box. If Byrd is involved in this, it means he's after my stuff. You've read about all the hotel robberies recently."

Dr. Hagger leaned forward. "Yesterday, when I first mentioned Byrd, you seemed not to know him. But you do know him, don't you?"

"Not by sight—but I know him all right!" The words poured out of Longman. "He phoned me last year, when I was still in the trucking business, trying to work a confidence game. Luckily, events forced me to retire from the business before he could pull the caper off. Your description of him was quite correct—he's a very clever con man. Since then I've heard from friends that he's unique in the field. Most con men are content to smooth-talk old ladies out of their life savings, but Byrd goes much further. He's been known to con criminals out of their loot, and even con other confidence men! He can talk smooth or tough."

"You seem to know a good deal about him. And here I thought I was telling you something!"

"You told me a great deal. You told me he was in this hotel, which is something I never would have known. And now you've told me he was with Ronny Spangle. That's of special interest, because there were rumors last year that Spangle hijacked some money off Byrd. I'm surprised the two

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are still speaking." His eyes narrowed for an instant and he went on, "But of course! Byrd is working a con again! He's getting Spangle set up to rob me, and then he's planning to con Spangle out of the loot!"

Dr. Hagger drew a breath. "Under the circumstances I'd certainly advise you to notify the police."

"Yeah. The police." Samuel Longman thought about the police, and the questions they might ask about all that jewelry. The story might even reach the newspapers. "Well—uh—you see, I'm in sort of an odd position, Doctor. If the police could be notified without me becoming involved—"

"I'd gladly call them if you wish. It certainly seems something illegal is afoot here."

"I'd appreciate that," Longman said.

"But that still leaves the problem of the jewelry you mentioned. I'd suggest moving it to a bank vault until this thing blows over. If New York is anything like Chicago, the police won't have the manpower to place a round-the-clock guard here for very long."

"Good idea," Longman agreed. "My wife can certainly manage without it for a few days." But then he glanced at his watch. "Damn! The banks close in ten minutes, and it's a Friday afternoon. They won't be open again till Monday."

"I wouldn't leave your valuables in the box over the weekend. You must move them somewhere."

Samuel Longman nodded. "I'll have to keep them in our suite."

"Good lord, no!" Dr. Hagger exclaimed. "Even I know that much about New York! Nothing's safe in a hotel room. You might as well leave it where it is."

"You're right, of course," Longman mused.

"I suppose it's a bit late now for lunch, but let's meet for dinner. Perhaps by then I'll think of something, and we can decide about notifying the police."

"Very good."

The doctor was just getting up from the table when a thought struck him. "Here's an idea. I have a safe-deposit box here—I don't trust hotel rooms either. Why don't you transfer your valuables to my box, at least for overnight? If they do rob the place, they certainly wouldn't have time to go through a hundred or more safe-deposit boxes. Naturally you can keep the key to my box."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," Longman protested.

"Why not? Better safe than

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sorry. Even if the police are tipped off, any number of things could go wrong."

Samuel Longman considered the situation. "Very well," he said at last. "I think I'll take you up on it."

"Good! Let's do it right now."

Longman followed him to the cashier's window, where the doctor presented his key. "Box 143, please."

The moon-faced woman accepted the key and gave him a signature card to sign. She compared the signature with the original she had on file and then stepped to the back wall of the enclosure. Doors slid open to reveal rows of steel-faced safe-deposit boxes, each with twin keyholes.

"I'll have my box, too," Longman said. "It's number 88."

She accepted Longman's key, checked his signature, and then pressed a button beneath the counter. "You can use the booths," she said.

They walked together to a door that buzzed and swung open at their touch. A small room was divided into two booths, each with a sliding glass window through which the woman passed the long flat metal boxes. Longman opened his and extracted a number of black velvet jewel boxes.

"Don't let her see what you're doing," Dr. Hagger cautioned. "You never know who might be in league with them."

"She can't see in here. Take these. I have more in here."

Hagger accepted the boxes without opening them and carefully stored them in his own safe-deposit box. "You do have a great deal of jewelry."

"A king's ransom, really. Too much for safety. Let me show you some of these pieces."

But Hagger held up his hand. "I'd rather not. I'm just doing you a favor." He finished storing the velvet boxes away and closed the lid. Then each man opened his window and returned the boxes to the cashier. When she gave them their keys, the doctor handed his to Longman. "I insist you hold this—after all, you really don't know me."

"Well, all right." Longman accepted the key to box 143 and placed it in his pocket along with the key to his own empty box. "I really appreciate this, Doctor."

"Think nothing of it. And now I'll notify the police."

Ulysses S. Byrd met Spangle on a bench near the Central Park Zoo at five o'clock that afternoon. "Did you get a good

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look at the lobby?" he asked. "And did you talk to the cashier?"

Spangle nodded. "I did just like you told me. The layout's a good one for us. The cashier's area, with the safe-deposit boxes, can only be seen from the cocktail lounge, and that'll be closed when we make our move. Anyone entering the lobby won't even see what's happening."

"How about the Zambini brothers?"

"I've got them. When do we move?"

Byrd shrugged. "Why wait? Let's do it tonight."

"Tonight?"

"Sure. I'll have a car in front of the hotel at two thirty. You and the Zambinis go in around two fifteen, after the lounge is closed, and go to work. They'll have a list of the box-holders. We want Samuel Longman. Don't bother with anyone else."

"That's only giving us fifteen minutes."

"You can't risk any longer. The Zambinis can keep the employees covered while you work on the box. If you take more than five minutes on it, you'd better turn in your mask and gun and go into another line of work."

"All right," Ronny Spangle agreed finally. "You just be there with the car."

Helen was restless in bed. At one point she turned over and poked Longman in the side. "Are you sure my jewels are safe?"

"My dear, I told you we notified the police. If Byrd and Spangle try to rob the place, they'll be in for a big surprise."

"I don't know. I just don't like it. What time is it?"

"Two o'clock. Go to sleep."

"I wish you'd go down."

"Down where?"

"To the lobby, to see that they're safe."

Longman sighed and rolled over on his stomach, taking the blanket with him. "Go to sleep," he said again.

"We're regular residents here, Sammy. The hotel should do something special to guard our valuables."

"I told you there's nothing to worry about. If Byrd comes, the police will grab him. And even if they don't the jewelry is safe."

"I sure hope so, Sammy."

At exactly two fifteen Ronny Spangle pulled the nylon stocking down over his face and looked both ways on Central Park South. The extra car was parked down the block—just in case Byrd pulled a double-cross—and the Zam-

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bini brothers were in position beside him. He nodded to them and pushed through the revolving door into the lobby.

The night desk clerk glanced up and away, then back again in a quick double-take. "Don't move," Spangle told him, leveling the revolver.

One of the Zambinis came up behind Spangle to cover the clerk while Spangle went around to the cashier's window. A shirt-sleeved man was at work at the machine, posting the day's accounts on the individual ledger cards. "Freeze," Spangle said. "I'm coming in."

The other Zambini came around from the front desk, bizarre-looking in his stocking mask. "How many others are there?"

"Just me and the fellow out front," the cashier answered nervously.

"Telephone operator?"

"In the back there."

Zambini herded him in with the operator. "Wait!" Spangle said, gesturing with his gun. "We need the number of Samuel Longman's box."

"I can't give you that," the man in shirt-sleeves answered.

Spangle pushed the gun barrel into his stomach. "No?"

"All right. I'll get the list."

Spangle grinned behind his stocking mask at the ease of it all. He snatched the list away from the man and glanced down it. "Box 88. Now the key!"

"I just have the one key. You need his, too, to open it."

Spangle grabbed the key from the man's hand and motioned him away. He slid open the doors and found box 88. Working quickly, he inserted one key and turned it, then went after the other lock. It took him exactly three minutes.

"Got it!" he told the nearest Zambini. "How's our time?"

"Perfect."

Spangle lifted the lid and peered into the metal box.

It was empty.

At this moment, in the darkness of the adjoining booth, Detective Sergeant Oscar Holland slid open the small glass window and poked the barrel of his shotgun through the opening. "Hold it right there!" he barked. "You're under arrest!"

Ronny Spangle started to reach for the revolver and then thought better of it. Looking around, he saw that both of the Zambinis were covered by other detectives. He raised his hands slowly above his head.

Samuel Longman came down to the lobby dressed in his pajamas and robe. His eyes were blurred with sleep, for the phone call from the front desk

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had roused him just after he'd finally dropped off into a deep slumber. He glanced at the detectives, and at the three handcuffed men herded against one wall, and looked up at a tall broad-shouldered man who approached him.

"Sergeant Holland, sir. I had the clerk phone you because we've had an attempted holdup here."

"I know," Longman replied. "At least, it doesn't surprise me. I'm the one who had you tipped off this afternoon. Another man and myself became suspicious when we saw this one in the lobby." His pointing finger indicated Ronny Spangle, standing unmasked between the Zambini brothers. "This one and Ulysses S. Byrd."

"Byrd?" Sergeant Holland asked. "I know Byrd, but there's no sign of him around here."

"He was waiting in the car," Spangle spat out. "The whole caper was his idea!"

The detective led Longman over to the rows of safe-deposit boxes. "Spangle opened your box, but it was empty."

"I know," Longman said with a smile. "I moved my valuables to a friend's box this afternoon. They're all safe."

"What friend was that?"

"Dr. Hagger. He's attending the medical convention here." Longman fished Hagger's key from his pocket. "You see, Hagger recognized Byrd in the lobby—knew him from Chicago. Hagger is Assistant Medical Examiner there."

Sergeant Holland nodded. "Maybe you'd better open Hagger's box, too."

"Without him?"

"I think so. You see, Chicago doesn't have a Medical Examiner. They still use the old Coroner system out there."

They took the key from Longman's suddenly limp fingers and opened box 143. The jewel boxes were gone, and in their place was only a single small bird's feather, resting on a slip of paper that read: *The Early Byrd catches the jewels.*

"You mean Dr. Hagger is really Byrd?" Longman asked, still unable to accept it. "But he pointed out Byrd in the lobby."

"Did you actually *see* the man he identified as Byrd?"

"Not really, I suppose. But Hagger is a much older man."

"A wig, a little makeup—no problem."

A detective came back from the front desk. "There's no Dr. Hagger attending the convention, though he is registered for room 437."

"Was, you mean," Sergeant Holland said. "He needed the room to get the safe-deposit box."

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Longman had collapsed onto a chair. "But I've had his key in my pocket all the time!"

"Hagger checked in two days ago. Plenty of time to have a duplicate key made. He gave you one and used the other himself earlier this evening."

"At exactly seven twenty, according to this time stamp," a detective observed, holding up the signature card for box 143.

Longman ran a hand over his face. "We were dining together then, and he excused himself. He wasn't gone more than five minutes."

"That's all the time he needed. Even though he gave you a duplicate key, he knew you couldn't enter his box without forging his signature. The jewels were safe there till he had a chance to remove them."

"But why did he bring this man Spangle into it? And why did he betray Spangle to the police?"

"You knew Spangle, and when you recognized him it added to the reality of the plot. That's why he had Spangle question the cashier about the safe-deposit boxes while you were watching." Holland turned to the handcuffed man. "And as for tipping off the police, I think Byrd was merely settling an old score." Spangle cursed and spat at the carpeted floor.

"You mean he arranged the holdup and everything just so he could steal the jewels first, before the holdup men arrived?"

Sergeant Holland fingered the tiny feather and nodded. "I guess that's why he's called 'The Early Byrd.' "

"O"

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THE DOG IN THE MERGER

by JON L. BREEN

1. Sit Up

Wall Street is the climax of civilization. That this chauffeured Rolls-Royce should stand in front of the Moneyback Guaranty Trust, Twain invaded Hannibal and Astaire danced in cloistered oxfords.

John Thwackham Putter, the Moneyback's executive vice-president and house detective, knew with well-honed pessimism that the passengers from that Rolls, Mrs. Chloe Winthrop and her red-sweatered dachshund, were on their way to see him. He briefly plotted a means

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of escape, considered asking his hyper-efficient secretary Miss Crossa (don't) to aid him in implementing it; but his higher instincts prevailed—the late Addison Winthrop had been, after all, an old college friend, and there was a good bit of the Moneyback's money riding on the fortunes of the Winthrop Publishing Company. So he supposed he would see them.

"John," Chloe Winthrop said without preamble, "there is trouble brewing at Winthrop. Irving and I are very worried."

"Irving," Putter echoed blankly.

"Oh, you haven't met," Chloe simpered with over-ripe coyness. "This is Irving, Addison's best friend."

Putter shook the dachshund's proffered paw unblinkingly.

"Irving is the new President and Chairman of the Board of the Winthrop Publishing Company. It was a stipulation in Addison's will. He will meet with upper management this afternoon, John. I want you to be there. I think some of the divisional heads, who are also stockholders, are going to try to force Irving out as President."

Putter appeared unshakably calm, but his mind was racing. "Why should they want a thing like that?" he queried drily.

"I can't imagine," replied Chloe. "Irving hasn't even had a chance to show what he can do."

"Why did Addison name him Irving?"

"Why, after his authors, of course. The seven best-selling novelists on Winthrop's list are all named Irving. Won't you come to the meeting today, John? I don't think Irving is quite ready to mediate the power struggle that will inevitably ensue among the divisional heads."

Putter had a drink of water. The old school tie felt disquietingly like a noose.

2. Roll Over

Over a weight-watcher's lunch, Putter queried his good friend Ned Roubidoux about Winthrop Publishing.

Roubidoux looked pained. "You know I don't like to discuss business over a meal, John." Ned, shunning the dieter's special, had a mouthful of gumdrop salad.

"Sorry, Ned, but at the end of the meal you always fall asleep. And I need to know all the gossip I can pick up."

"They're planning a merger with Consolidated Book. Winthrop fought it while he was alive, but now they want it badly to stay in business. The

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installation of this dog as President and Chairman of the Board has led to some question on the part of C.B. about Winthrop's stability."

"Understandable."

"I understand there's a power struggle among the divisional chiefs—they're all big stockholders in the firm. That was another of old Winthrop's policies to keep good people."

Swallowing his indignation at hearing his departed school chum designated as "old Winthrop," Putter sighed. "Looks very sticky."

"The gumdrop salad? It isn't really. Very good."

"I meant the situation at Winthrop."

"Well, as my eighth wife used to say . . ."

"Eighth wife? I didn't know you'd remarried again, Ned."

"Oh, yes."

"Congratulations."

"Thank you. Divorce became final yesterday."

"Congratulations."

"Thank you. Marry my ninth tomorrow."

"Congratulations."

"Thank you."

3. Fetch

"We need a bigger office," said Tolkien Black.

His superior, Mark Sage, Winthrop's Chief of Editorial, winced visibly. Black, as the only assistant in the room, should have known his place better than he did, but you just couldn't suggest such a thing to the firm's only Negro employee.

"It's not right that Glue should have an office the size of Grand Central Station and a three-inch carpet, while Editorial is relegated to a broom closet."

Anselm Buckram, Chief of Glue, glared at Mark Sage, who was reddening. "Tol," said Sage softly, "it's not really a broom closet. It used to be a *coat* closet, it's true, but . . ."

Gilmore Snoodge, Chief of Printing, the blue veins in his nose standing out in contrast to the ascetic gray of his thin face, said, "You should be happy with that. I can't imagine why Editorial, a bunch of virtual clerks, have been placed on an equal level with the backbones of publishing—printing, paper, and glue."

Weatherington Todd, Chief of Paper, his bald head bulging egglike above his bifocals, said mildly, "Vertebrates have but one backbone, Gil, and in a publishing vertebrate that backbone is paper."

"Glue holds this company together!" roared Anselm Buck-

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ram, his face as red with anger as Sage's was with embarrassment. "Ever picked up a book without glue? It'll fall apart every time."

"Without paper," Todd said quietly, "there's nothing to fall apart."

"Without printing," Snoodge retorted in a piping tenor, "there's nothing on the paper."

"And without editorial," said Tolkien Black, "it's all garbage anyway! When we get control of this operation, it will be relevant, gentlemen, I assure you of that!"

"And full of dirty words," Snoodge shrieked. "I know you people!"

"What people?" Black inquired menacingly.

"Editors, of course," said Snoodge, backpedaling in his swivel chair.

Mark Sage was sweating. He never should have let Black sit in on this meeting. Sage had no desire to wrest control of the company. He was happy in his coat closet, happier still to let Glue, Printing, and Paper fight these roaring battles among themselves. Editorial, after all, was such a small part of the book-making process—and anyone could do it, anyone who could read. Glue, on the other hand, had charge of binding the books, Printing of their content . . .

"That dog will be out, and we'll be in!" Black was orating. Sage began to wonder about Black: did this dynamic assistant have designs on his job?

4. Say Your Prayers

Irving sat at the head of the conference table and regarded his subordinates gravely. They looked at him expectantly and deferentially, willing to let the new President have his say before they commenced the grinding of their respective axes.

A long silence ensued. Up to now things had gone smoothly enough—each division chief had shaken the paw of the new President, complimented him on his red sweater, promised him loyalty and given him best wishes. But as the silence lengthened, the room's occupants became restless and uneasy.

Finally John Thwackham Putter spoke. "Now that your new President has completed his remarks . . ."

An unsure smattering of applause for the new President's remarks interrupted Putter briefly.

"Your President has asked me to help him in the selection of a managing chief to oversee the firm's day-to-day opera-

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tions. The President has other commitments, you see . . ."

"Quite, quite," said Weatherington Todd. "As Chief of Paper, the key division in any publishing operation . . ."

"I don't mean to get sticky about this," muttered Anselm Buckram, appearing to hold himself tightly in rein, "but as Chief of Glue . . ."

"I think you should defer to the Chief of Printing," Snoodge interrupted.

As Tolkien Black wound up, preparing to explode into Editorial rhetoric, with Mark Sage already sinking below the conference table, the door of the room burst open and a newcomer appeared. "Stop this merger!" the wild-eyed, rumpled, middle-aged figure cried.

"We're not merging till tomorrow, Irving," said Mark Sage meekly. "This is a staff meeting."

"You mean the President of Consolidated Book isn't here?"

"No," said Sage regretfully.

"Then I'll return tomorrow and rock this so-called publishing company to its very foundations. Irving Bailey will not be toyed with!"

The door slammed as suddenly as it had burst.

"Who was that?" Buckram snarled.

Tolkien Black said tauntingly, "Right at the heart of the action, aren't you, Buckram? Don't even know one of our best-selling authors. That was Irving Bailey."

"Irving Bailey?" said John Thwackham Putter. "Author of all those eight-hundred-page best-sellers?" He'd never read one, but Miss Crossa often chose them as Christmas presents for his alarming stable of relatives.

"Yes," said Black. "They were all best-sellers till his last one, which sold all of two thousand copies. He's a bit upset over that."

"Why did the latest one fail?" Putter asked curiously.

"I don't know," said Sage.

"It had the same kind of paper," said Todd.

"Same type face," asserted Snoodge.

"Same binding," said Buckram.

"Same damn plot," laughed Black. "We won't need *schlockmeisters* like that when we get started publishing relevant literature."

"I wonder what he meant," Mark Sage mused, "about rocking the company to its foundations . . ."

Irving (the President) jumped from the table onto the head chair, thence to the floor, a hazardous undertaking for a short-legged executive. He waddled over to Chloe Winthrop,

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sitting at the end of the table, and barked once, with shrill authority.

"I guess the meeting is adjourned," she said with a small smile.

"But we haven't settled anything!" said Anselm Buckram.

Mark Sage suggested shyly, "Could we show a little more confidence in our leader?"

5. Play Dead

The murder by shooting of best-selling novelist Irving Bailey was reported sedately in the next morning's edition of *The New York Times*. John Thwackham Putter, studying the paper over his morning coffee, felt sure there was some connection between Bailey's death and the seeming threat of the day before. Something was very wrong at Winthrop, something that would lead Consolidated Book to think twice about merger talk, something that Bailey had planned to reveal at today's meeting. What could it be? Did it have some connection with Bailey's last novel?

Putter called Miss Crossa into his office. "Tell me, Miss Crossa, did I give Irving Bailey's latest novel to any of my relatives this past Christmas?"

"No, sir," she said.

"Why not?"

Miss Crossa seemed to see some threat to her position in the question. "Mr. Putter, if at any time you are in any way dissatisfied with my selection of presents, I will be happy to . . ."

"You misunderstand, Miss Crossa. I'm not criticizing your selection of presents. I'm merely wondering why you chose not to buy Bailey's newest book. What was it about? Do you recall?"

"Well, it was called *Vatican Airport*."

"What sort of book?"

"A religious-Grand-Hotel-romantic-political-gangster-sex novel."

"His usual, in other words?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't it sell?"

"I can't imagine, Mr. Putter. The reviews were every bit as bad as usual."

"Why didn't *you* buy it, Miss Crossa?"

"Mr. Putter, I will not be cross-examined. Private secretaries of my skill and experience are in great demand, much greater I might add than overage executives, and if I may remind you that you are three minutes and fifty-one seconds behind the schedule I prepared . . ."

"Miss Crossa, you are begin-

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ning to try my patience," said Putter with uncharacteristic vehemence. "Why didn't you buy the book? What put you off?"

She thought for a moment. "Mr. Putter, I don't like to say this about a man who just died this morning . . ."

"Please, Miss Crossa. Lives may depend upon it."

"Really, Mr. Putter . . ."

"Money may depend upon it, Miss Crossa!"

She summoned her courage. "Very well, sir. The book smelled bad, Mr. Putter."

"It smelled bad, Miss Crossa?"

"Yes, sir."

"Most interesting . . . Cancel my morning appointments and get me Ned Roubidoux on the phone."

6. Heel

John Thwackham Putter burst into the offices of Winthrop Publishing in the nick of time.

Calls to Ned Roubidoux and a banker friend had elicited some fascinating information about one of Winthrop's section chiefs: regular checks had been deposited in his name and signed by seven different authors named Irving. It was a clever form of protection racket. Putter had suspected something of the sort: pay me a percentage of your earnings and I'll protect your status as a best-seller. Also, his educated guess as to which section chief was the culprit had proved correct. But he knew that Irving, the new President, was in the gravest danger, because of his special ability to sniff out the roots of a corporate problem.

"Where is Irving?" Putter demanded of a startled-looking secretarial pool.

"The President, you mean? He was just going down the hall toward Editorial, sir."

"Are Sage and Black there?"

"No, sir, they've gone out to the warehouse."

Putter, belying his 64 years, sprinted down the hallway toward Editorial. Inches from the door he scooped up Irving. The door to the Editorial closet was slightly ajar—behind it a familiar voice was whispering, "Here, Irving. Come on, boy. Come on, Mr. President."

Putter swung the door open and saw Anselm Buckram, Chief of Glue, standing there, a freshly sharpened blue pencil flashing in his hand, a crazed look in his eye. Seconds later, before Putter could do anything, there was a glassy look in Buckram's eye and a blue pencil in his heart.

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7. Speak

"It was quite a scheme," Putter told Irving, Chloe Winthrop, and the surviving department heads, which now included Tolkien Black as new Chief of Glue. "Irving Bailey's outburst and the advent of Irving as President presented a double threat to the plot, but Buckram thought he could ride it out by eliminating them both. In killing Irving—President Irving, I mean, not Irving Bailey—with a sharpened blue pencil in the Editorial office, he had hoped to shift the suspicion to Messrs. Sage and Black. To lure Irving he had placed a stack of books specially bound with glue that smelled just like hamburger in the Editorial office.

"The glue, of course, was the key to the plot. Buckram knew what subtle importance the olfactory sense had in determining people's book-buying habits. He knew a foul-smelling book with foul-smelling glue would never sell. On the other hand, sweetly scented glue could actually *help* a book's chances. It is largely subliminal—you are only subconsciously aware of how a book smells. I, for example, couldn't smell the hamburger on those books in the office, but Irving, with a highly developed sense of smell, could and was nearly lured to his death.

"Conceivably the smell of the paper or of the ink could have done the same kind of job, but there were other factors that made me suspect Buckram. He claimed he didn't know Bailey, which seemed highly unlikely to me, making me wonder why he should be so anxious to disassociate himself from one of Winthrop's best-selling writers.

"Also, he never specifically claimed Bailey's new book had the same glue as the previous ones, when you gentlemen were so busy passing the buck. He merely said the *binding* was the same, as if he didn't even want us to think about the glue.

"Finally, the Glue Division was in charge of the whole binding process, the putting together of the books, giving him more latitude for hanky-panky than the rest of you gentlemen were afforded."

"Glue is clearly the key to the publishing business," Tolkien Black agreed.

"On Irving Bailey's latest novel, Buckram overdid the bad-smelling glue in his eagerness to punish Bailey for his failure to kick in his protection money. Bailey's book stank and everybody *knew* it stank. That made Bailey so angry that he was determined to give away

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Buckram's plot whatever the cost."

"A great man," said Weatherington Todd, blinking his dewy eyes.

"A great writer," said Gilmore Snoodge.

"Our next book will be an Irving Bailey memorial omnibus," said Mark Sage. "*The Best of Irving Bailey*, beginning with his prize-winning third-grade composition and ending with the climactic summit conference seduction scene from *Vatican Airport.*"

"Bound with the sweetest-smelling glue this side of heaven," Tolkien Black beamed.

CRIMINALIMERICK

WHO KNOWS WHAT EVIL. . .?

by D. R. BENSEN

The Shadow quite frequently finds
Himself in the tightest of binds;
But from all such scrapes
He nimbly escapes
By his power of clouding men's minds.

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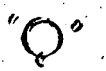
"There are more things in heaven and earth . . . Than are dreamt of in your philosophy". . .

SENTENCE OF DEATH

by EDWARD WELLEN

SHE: Can he say I didn't warn him? Hardly. I told him and told him it need not come to this. But would he listen? No. I warned him and warned him. We could have left this jurisdiction before the trial. But would he listen? No. Everyone knows the court was willing to let him off if only he backed down a little and offered to pay a big enough fine—a sum his idle friends would easily and gladly have raised. I urged him and urged him. But would he listen? No. Even now his good-for-nothing friends would help him escape. I begged him and begged him to agree to let them. But does he listen? No. Lost in the clouds as usual. Did I empty a chamber pot over his head that time—or did I empty his head, rather, by mistake? How else explain why he leaves me and the babe in my arms alone in the world like this? Why didn't he ever listen to me?

HE: She's gone? Then here's my farewell kiss, sweet cup of hemlock. Slowly, lest I think it is not principle alone that makes me drink you.



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The thief did not realize the gravity of his crime . . .

O, FOR A SIGN

by EDWARD WELLEN

IDLER: If I be downcast, and have sinful thoughts, shall I not rather blame the nature of the world I see about me? Where is the logic in a world where Bubonic Plague rages, striking down the just and the unjust alike—to say naught of closing Cambridge and sending me home from my studies. Studies! Alas, all study is useless if there be no beautiful system proceeding from the dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being. O, for a sign there's purpose in the universe.

THIEF: Devil take that dreamer! When will he move away from under this tree that I may climb down it and slip out of the garden? The gardener will come pruning ere long, see me, clap his shoulder-of-mutton hand on my ankle—and I'll face transportation to the Colonies for helping myself to a shirtful of this one's father's precious fruit. I'll give young master Newton a hint shall make him leave: let fall an apple to land plumb beside him on the ground.

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a *NEW* crime story by

RUTH RENDELL

We are happy to welcome Ruth Rendell in her first appearance in the pages of EQMM—with more stories, we hope, to come . . . "Venus's-flytrap," shrewdly and subtly clued, is a thoroughly British crime story—that is to say, we can't imagine it having been written by an American, a German, an Italian—by anyone other than an English writer.

Ruth Rendell's recent crime novel, ONE ACROSS, TWO DOWN, *was judged one of the best mysteries published in the United States in 1971. A quotation from one of the reviews of the book also describes this short story: "A wickedly ironic, minutely observed, psychologically sound fable of crime and punishment. . ."*

VENUS'S-FLYTRAP

by RUTH RENDELL

As soon as Daphne had taken off her hat and put it on Merle's bed, Merle picked it up and rammed it on her own yellow curls. It was a red felt hat and by chance it matched Merle's red dress.

"It's a funny thing, dear," said Merle, looking at herself in the dressing-table mirror, "but anyone seeing us two—any outsider, I mean—would never think that I was the single one and you'd had all those husbands and children."

"I only had two husbands and three children," said Daphne.

"You know what I mean," said Merle, and Daphne, standing beside her friend, had to admit she did. Merle was so big, so pink and overflowing and female, while she—well, she had given up pretending she was anything but a little dried-up widow, 70 years old and looking every day of it.

Merle took off the hat and placed it beside the doll whose

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yellow satin skirts concealed Merle's nightgown and bag of hair rollers. "I'll show you the flat and then we'll have a sherry and rest our feet. I got some of that walnut-brown. You see I haven't forgotten your tastes even after forty years."

Daphne didn't say it was dry sherry she had then and still preferred. She trotted meekly after Merle. She was just beginning to be aware of the intense heat. Clouds of warmth seemed to breathe out of the embossed wallpaper and up through the lush furry carpets.

"I really am thrilled about you coming to live in this block, dear," said Merle. "This is my little spare room. I like to think I can put up a friend if I want. Not that many of them come. Between you and me, dear, people rather resent my having done so well for myself and all on my own initiative. People are so mean-spirited—I've noticed that as I've got older. That's why I was so thrilled when you agreed to come here. I mean, when *someone* took my advice."

"You've made it all very nice," said Daphne.

"Well, I always say the flat had the potential and I had the taste. Of course, yours is much smaller and frankly I wouldn't say it lends itself to a very ambitious décor. In your place, the first thing I'd do is have central heating put in."

"I expect I will if I can afford it."

"You know, Daphne, there are some things we owe it to ourselves to afford. But you know your own business best and I wouldn't dream of interfering. If the cold gets you down you're welcome to come up here at any time. *Any* time, I mean that. Now this is my drawing room, my *piece de resistance.*"

Merle opened the door with the air of a girl lifting the lid of a jewel case that holds a lover's gift.

"What a lot of plants," said Daphne faintly.

"I was always mad about plants. My first business venture was a florist's shop. I could have made a little gold mine out of it if my partner hadn't been so wickedly vindictive. She was determined to oust me from the first. D'you like my suite? I had it completely redone in oyster satin last year and I do think it's a success."

The atmosphere was that of a hothouse. The chairs, the sofa, the lamps, the little piecrust tables with their loads of bibelots, were islanded in the center of the large room. No, not an island perhaps, Daphne thought, but a clearing in a tropical jungle. Shelves, window

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sills, white troughs on white wrought-iron legs, were burgeoned with lush trailing growth—green, glossy, frondy, all immobile and all giving forth a strange scent.

"They take up all my time. It's not just the watering and watching the temperature and so on. Plants know when you love them. They only flourish in an atmsophere of love. I honestly don't believe you'd find a better specimen of an *opuntia* in London than mine. I'm particularly proud of the *peperomias* and the *xygocacti* too. Of course, I suppose you've seem them growing in their natural habitat with all your mad rushing around those foreign places."

"We were mostly in Stockholm and New York, Merle."

"Oh, were you? So many years went by when you never bothered to write to me that I really couldn't keep pace. I thought about you a lot, of course. I want you to know you really had my sympathy, moving all the time and that awful divorce from what's-his-name, and babies to cope with, and then getting married again and everything. I used to feel how sad it was that I'd made so much out of my life while you—what's the matter?"

"That plant, Merle. It moved!"

"That's because you touched it. When you touch one of its mouths it closes up. It's called *Dionaea Muscipula*."

The plant stood alone in a majolica pot within an elaborate white stand. It looked very healthy. It had delicate shiny leaves and from its heart grew five red-gold blossoms. As Daphne peered more closely she saw that these resembled mouths, just as Merle had put it, far more than flowers—whiskery mouths, soft and ripe and luscious. One of these was now closed.

"Doesn't it have a common name?"

"Of course it does. Venus's-flytrap. *Muscipula* means fly eater, dear."

"Whatever *do* you mean?"

"It eats flies. I've been trying to grow one for years. I was absolutely thrilled when I succeeded."

"Yes, but what d'you mean, it eats flies? It's not an animal."

"It is in a way, dear. The trouble is there aren't many flies here. I feed it on little bits of meat. You've gone rather pale, Daphne. Have you got a headache? We'll have our sherry now and then I'll see if I can catch a fly and you can see it eat it up."

"I'd really much rather not, Merle," said Daphne, backing away from the plant. "I don't

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want to hurt your feelings but I don't—well, I don't like the idea of catching, free, live things and feeding them to—that."

"Free, live things? We're talking about flies." Merle, large and perfumed, grabbed Daphne's arm and pulled her away. Merle's dress was of red chiffon with trailing sleeves and her fingernails matched it. "The trouble with you," said Merle, "is that you're a mass of nerves and you're much worse now than you were when we were girls. I thank God every day of my life I don't know what it is to be neurotic. Here you are, your sherry. I've put it in a big glass to buck you up. I'm going to make it my business to look after you, Daphne. You don't know anybody else in London, do you?"

"Hardly anybody," said Daphne, sitting down where she couldn't see the Flytrap. "My boys are in the States and my daughter's in Scotland."

"Well, you must come up here every day. No, you won't be intruding. When I first knew you were definitely coming, I said to myself, I'm going to see to it that Daphne isn't lonely. But don't imagine you'll get on with the other tenants in this block. Those of them who aren't standoffish snobs are—well, not the sort of people you'd want to know. But we won't talk about them. We'll talk about us. Unless, of course, you feel your past has been too painful to talk about?"

"I wouldn't quite say—"

"No, you won't care to rake up unpleasant memories. I'll just put a drop more sherry in your glass and then I'll tell you all about my last venture, my agency."

Daphne rested her head against a cushion, brushed away an ivy frond, and prepared to listen.

Merle was scraping slivers of meat from a piece of fillet steak. She was all in diaphanous gold today, an amber chain around her neck, the finery half covered by a frilly apron.

"I used to do that for my babies when they first went on solids," said Daphne.

"Babies, babies. You're always talking about your babies. You've been up here every day for three weeks now and I don't think you've once missed the opportunity to mention your babies and your men. Oh, I'm sorry, dear, I don't mean to upset you, but one really does get so weary of women like you talking about that side of life as if one had actually *missed* something."

"Why are you scraping that meat, Merle?"

"To feed my little Venus.

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That's her breakfast. Come along. I've got a fly I caught under a sherry glass but I couldn't catch more than one."

The fly was crawling up the inside of the glass, but when Merle approached it, it began to buzz frenziedly against the transparent dome of its prison. Daphne turned her back. She went to the window, the huge plant-filled bay window, and looked out, pretending to be interested in the view. She heard the scrape of glass and a triumphant gasp from Merle. Then Merle began talking to the plant in a gentle, maternal voice.

"This really is a wonderful outlook," said Daphne brightly. "You can see for miles."

Merle said, "*C'est Venus toute entiere a sa proie attachee.*"

"I beg your pardon?"

"You never were any good at languages, dear. Oh, don't pretend you're so mad about that view. You're just being absurdly sensitive about what really amounts to *gardening*. I can't bear that sort of dishonesty. I've finished now, anyway. She's had her breakfast and all her mouths are shut. Who are you waving to?"

"A rather nice young couple who live in the next flat to me."

"Well, please don't." Merle looked down and then drew herself up, all golden pleats and stiff golden curls. "You couldn't know, dear, but those two people are the very end. For one thing, they're not married, I'm sure of that. Of course, that's no business of mine. What is my business is that they've been keeping a dog here—look, that spaniel thing—and it's strictly against the rules to keep animals in these flats."

"What about your Flytrap?"

"Oh, don't be silly! As I was saying, they keep that dog and let it foul the garden. I wrote to the managing agents, but those agents are so lax—they've no respect for me because I'm a single woman, I suppose. But I wrote again the day before yesterday and now I understand they're definitely going to be turned out."

Forty feet below the window, in the parking space between the block and the garden, the boy who wore blue jeans and a leather jacket picked up his dog and placed it on the rear seat of a rather battered car. His companion, a girl with waist-length hair, got into the passenger seat, but the boy hesitated. As Merle brought her face close to the glass, he looked up and raised two wide-splayed fingers.

"Oaf!" said Merle. "The only thing to do with people

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like that is to ignore them. Can you imagine it, he lets that dog of his foul a really beautiful specimen of *cryptomeria japonica.* Let's forget him and have a nice cup of coffee."

"Merle, how long will those flowers last on that Venus thing of yours? I mean, they'll soon die away, won't they?"

"No, they won't. They'll last for ages. You know, Daphne, fond as I am of you, I wouldn't leave you alone in this flat for anything. You've a personal hatred of my *muscipula.* You'd like to destroy it."

"I'll put the coffee on," said Daphne.

Merle phoned for a taxi. Then she put her little red address book with all the phone numbers in it into her scarlet patent-leather handbag along with her lipstick, her gold compact, her keys, her check book, and four five-pound notes.

"We could have walked," said Daphne.

"No, we couldn't, dear. When I have a day at the shops I like to feel fresh. I don't want to half kill myself walking there. It's not the cost that's worrying you, is it? Because you know I'll pay. I appreciate the difference between our incomes, Daphne, and if I don't harp on it it's only because I try to be tactful. I want to buy you something, something really nice to wear. It seems such a wicked shame to me those men of yours didn't see to it you were well provided for."

"I've got quite enough clothes, Merle."

"Yes, but all gray and black. The only bright thing you've got is that red hat and you've stopped wearing that."

"I'm old, Merle dear I don't want to get myself up in bright colors. I've had my life."

"Well, I haven't had mine! I mean, I—" Merle bit her lip, getting scarlet lipstick on her teeth.

She walked across the room, picked her ocelot coat off the back of the sofa, and paused in front of the Flytrap. Its soft, flame-colored mouths were open. She tickled them with her fingertips and they snapped shut. Merle giggled. "You know what you remind me of, Daphne? A fly. That's just what you look like in your gray coat and that funny bit of veil on your hat. A *fly.*"

"There's the taxi," said Daphne.

It deposited them outside a large overheated store. Merle dragged Daphne through the jewelry department, the perfumery, past revolving stands with belts on them, past plastic mannequins in lingerie. They

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went up in the elevators. Merle bought a dress, orange chiffon with sequins all over the skirt.

They went down in the elevator and into the next store. Merle bought face bracer and eau de toilette and a gilt choker. They went up on the escalator. Merle bought a belt of brass links and tried to buy Daphne a green and blue silk scarf. Daphne consented at last to be presented with a pair of stockings, elastic support ones for her veins.

"Now we'll have lunch on the roof garden," said Merle.

"I should like a cup of tea."

"And I'll have a large sherry. But first I must freshen up. I'm dying to spend a penny and do my face."

They queued with their pennies. The Ladies Room had green-marble dressing tables with mirrors all down one side and washbasins down the other. Daphne sat down. Her feet had begun to swell. There were 20 or 30 other women in the room, doing their faces, combing their hair, replacing false eyelashes.

Merle put her scarlet handbag down on a free bit of green marble. She washed her hands, went over and helped herself to a gush of Calèche from the scent-squirting machine, came back, opening and shutting her coat to fan herself. It was even hotter than in her flat.

She sat down and drew her chair to the mirror.

"Where's my handbag?" Merle screamed. "I left my handbag right here! Someone's stolen my handbag. Daphne, Daphne, someone's stolen my handbag!"

The oyster satin sofa sagged under Merle's weight. Daphne smoothed back the golden curls and put another pad of cotton soaked in cologne on Merle's red corrugated forehead.

"Bit better now?" asked Daphne.

"I'm quite all right. I'm not one of your neurotic women to get into a state over a thing like that. Thank God, I left a spare key with the porter."

"You'll have to have both locks changed, Merle."

"Of course I will eventually. I'll see to it next week. Nobody can get in here, can they? And they don't know who I am. I mean, they don't know whose keys they've got."

"They've got your handbag."

"Daphne dear, I do wish you wouldn't keep stating the obvious. I *know* they've got my handbag. The point is, there was nothing in my handbag to show who I am."

"There was your check book with your name on it."

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"My name, dear, in case it's escaped your notice, is M. Smith. Just the initial, and no address. I haven't gone about changing it all my life like you." Merle sat up and took a gulp of walnut-brown sherry.

"The store manager was charming, wasn't he, and the police? I daresay they'll find it, you know. It's a most distinctive handbag, not like that great black thing you cart about with you. My little red one could have gone inside yours. I wish I'd thought to put it there."

"I wish you had," said Daphne.

Daphne's phone rang. It was half-past nine and she was finishing her breakfast, sitting in front of her little electric fire.

Merle sounded very excited. "What do you think? Isn't it marvelous? The store manager's just phoned to say they've found my bag. Well, it wasn't him, it was his secretary, a stupid-sounding woman with one of those put-on accents. However, that's no concern of mine. They found my bag fallen behind a radiator in that Ladies Room. Isn't it an absolute miracle? Of course, the money was gone, but my check book was there and the keys. I'm very glad I didn't take your advice and change those locks yesterday. It never does to act on impulse, Daphne."

"No, I suppose not."

"I've arranged to go down and get my bag at eleven. As soon as I ring off I'm going to phone for a taxi and I want you to come with me, dear. I'll have a quick bath and see to my plants—I've managed to catch a bluebottle for Venus—and then the taxi will be here."

"I'm afraid I can't come," said Daphne.

"Why on earth not?"

Daphne hesitated. Then she said, "I said I hardly know anybody in London and that's true. But I do know this one man, this—well, he was a friend of my second husband and he's a widower now and he's coming to have lunch with me, Merle. He's coming at noon and I must be here to see to things."

"A *man*?" said Merle. "*Another* man?"

"I'll look out for your taxi and when I see you come back I'll just pop up and hear all about it, shall I? I'm sorry I can't—"

"Sorry? Sorry for what? I can get my handbag by myself. I'm quite used to standing on my own feet, thank you." The receiver went down with a crash.

Merle had a bath and put on the orange dress. It was rather showy for day wear, with its

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sequins and its fringes, but she could never bear to have a new dress and not wear it at once. The ocelot coat would cover most of it. She watered the *peperomias* and painted a little leaf gloss on the ivy. The bluebottle had died in the night, but *dionaea muscipula* didn't seem to mind. She opened her orange, strandy mouths for Merle and devoured the dead bluebottle along with the shreds of fillet steak.

Merle put on her cream silk turban and a long scarf of flame-colored silk. Her spare second-lock key was where she always kept it, underneath the *sanseveria* pot. She double-locked the door and then the taxi took her to the store.

Merle sailed into the manager's office and when the manager told her he had no secretary, had never had anyone phone her flat, and had certainly not found her handbag, she deflated like a fat orange balloon into which someone has stuck a pin.

"You've been the victim of a hoax, Miss Smith."

Merle pulled herself together. She could always do that—she had superb control. No, she didn't want aspirins or brandy or policemen or any of the other aids to quietude offered by the manager. After she had told him he didn't know his job, that if there was a conspiracy against her—as she was sure there must be—he was in it, she floundered down the stairs and flapped her mouth and her arms for a taxi.

When she got home the first thing that struck her as strange was that the door was only single-locked. She could have sworn she had double-locked it, but no doubt her memory was playing tricks and no wonder, the shock she had had. There was a little bit of earth on the hall carpet. Merle didn't like that—earth on her gold Wilton. Inside her ocelot she was sweating. She took off her coat and opened the drawing-room door.

Daphne saw the taxi arrive and Merle bounce out of it, like an orange orchid springing from a black bandbox. Merle looked wild with excitement, her turban all askew. Daphne smiled to herself and shook her head. She set the table and finished making the salad that she knew her friend would like with his lunch and then went upstairs to see Merle.

There was a mirror on each landing. Daphne was so small and thin that she didn't puff much when she had to climb stairs. As she came to the top of each flight she saw a little gray woman trotting to meet her, a

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woman with smooth white hair and large, rather diffident eyes, who wore a gray wool dress partly covered by a cloudy stole of lace.

She smiled at her reflection. She was old now, but she had had her moments—her joys, her gratifications, her intense pleasures. And soon there was to be a new pleasure, a confrontation she had looked forward to for weeks. Who could tell what would come of it? With a last smile at her gray and fluttery image, Daphne gently pushed open the unlocked door of Merle's flat.

In the Garden of Eden, the green paradisal bower, someone had dropped a bomb. No, they couldn't have done that, for the ceiling was still there and the carpet and the oyster satin furniture, torn now and plastered all over with earth.

Every plant had been broken and torn apart. Leaves lay scattered in heaps like the leaves of autumn, only these were green, succulent, bruised. In the rape of the room, in the midst of ripped foliage, stems bleeding sap, and shards of china lay the Venus's-flytrap, its roots wrenched from their pot and its mouths closed forever.

Merle tried to scream but the noise came out only as a gurgle, the agonized gasp of a scream in a nightmare. She fell on her knees and crawled about. Choking and muttering, she scrabbled in the earth, and picking up torn leaves tried to piece them together like bits of a jigsaw puzzle. She crouched over the Flytrap and nursed it in her hands, keening and swaying to and fro.

She didn't hear the door click shut. It was a long time before she realized Daphne was standing over her, silent, looking down. Merle lifted her red streaming face. Daphne had her hand over her mouth, the hand with the two wedding rings on it. Merle thought Daphne must be covering her mouth to stop herself from laughing—laughing out loud.

Slowly, heavily, Merle got up. Her long orange scarf was in her hands, stretched taut, twisting, twisting. She was surprised how steady her voice was, how level and sane.

"You did it," she said. "*You* did it. You stole my handbag and took my keys and got me out of here and came in and did all this."

Daphne quivered and shook her head.

"You were so jealous! You'd had nothing, but I had success and happiness and love." Merle's voice went up and the scarf with it. "How you hated

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me, hated, hated! Hate, hate, poisonous, jealous hate!"

Huge and red and frondy, she descended on Daphne, engulfing her with musky orange petals, twisting the scarf round the frail insect neck, devouring the fly until the fly quivered into stillness . . .

An elderly man in a black Homburg hat crossed the forecourt and went up the steps, a bunch of flowers in his hand.

The boy in the leather jacket took no notice of him. He brushed earth and bits of leaf off his hands and said to the girl with the long hair, "Revenge is sweet." Then he tossed the scarlet handbag that the girl had stolen in the Ladies Room into the back of the car, and he and the girl and the dog got in and drove away.

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a *NEW* "historical" by

THEODORE MATHIESON

Two months ago, in our November 1972 issue, we published Theodore Mathieson's "The F. Scott Fitzgerald Murder Case"— a "hitherto unknown" event in the life of a famous literary figure. As half predicted at that time, the story has now become the first in a new series of "historicals."

The second in the series is "John Barrymore and the Poisoned Chocolates"—another "hitherto unknown" chronicle of crime, this one melodramatically appropriate to the life and theatrical career of The Great Profile.

The third story in the series is already in inventory. It will appear soon, and again "reveal" a "hitherto unknown" mystery about a famous literary figure. Watch for it—it is called "Thomas Wolfe and the Tombstone Mystery"...

JOHN BARRYMORE AND THE POISONED CHOCOLATES

by THEODORE MATHIESON

"Don't make me do it, Mr. Barrymore! Please don't make me do it!"

The stranger who spoke had, just seconds before, broken in on our privacy. He stood in the middle of the living room of Jack's palatial home on Tower Road in Beverly Hills, pointing a snubnosed revolver at the matinee idol.

Jack, noting the shaking hand, the wild eyes flaring from the pallid face that had once been good-looking in the manner of Francis X. Bushman, moved casually toward the half-open, sun-shot French window with the intent, obviously, of leaping into the garden. Then he looked at me, lying on the sofa, and changed his mind. With the grace of a lean young Hamlet in street dress he picked up a cigarette from a table and lit it.

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"Won't you sit down, old man?" he asked politely. "You look familiar. Haven't we met before?"

"I don't know."

The Total Wreck subsided into a gilt chair near the rosewood desk. Jack sat down behind the desk.

"You still look familiar. What can I do to accommodate you?"

"*You* know. Tell me the truth. Share your secret. It's my only chance. I've been wiped out, everything gone. My wife, my child—all gone when the dam broke."

"The St. Francis?"

The man nodded. The water-supply dam north of Los Angeles had collapsed the preceding March, taking over 400 lives and destroying 700 homes.

"I'm sorry to hear of your misfortune. But you haven't told me what I can do for you."

"Don't make me say it. You'll think I'm crazy. Just *tell* me!"

Jack pursed his lips and glanced at me.

I had come from Hollywood as a temporary substitute for Henry Hotchener, Jack's business manager. A brash young graduate law student from U.C., determined to remain unimpressed by Hollywood royalty, I had slipped on the slick from a lawn sprinkler and badly twisted my ankle. I now lay helpless on the sofa. Jack had taped my ankle himself, although he'd been in the midst of packing, for it was the day before he was to leave on his honeymoon—December 29, 1928.

"Look, old man," Jack said carefully. "I've got a lot of things to do. I'm going on a little trip."

"I know. To Balboa with your new bride. You're taking the *Virginia* from Wilmington at midnight tomorrow."

"Don't tell me the papers have all that!"

"Everything you do is news, Mr. Barrymore. And now, won't you please tell me how you manage to do it?"

The man raised his revolver.

"First tell me a little about yourself," Jack said, stalling for time.

"I only know what they tell me. My—memory—seems to have gone."

Jack sat back in his chair; he had turned pale, as if someone had slapped him.

"What do they tell you?"

"That my name is Baylis Ambrose. I was an actor, and once played on Broadway; but I drank myself right off the stage. That I came to Hollywood and made a few silent movies that flopped. I had to take a flunky

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job with Standard Oil, but I continued my drinking. Then the flood came and I was wiped out. All I know now is that I want to start over as an actor. But when I look in the glass—well, you see me. Do you think women would swoon over a face like mine?"

Baylis Ambrose raised a veined hand and stroked his wreckage of a face.

"Would it help," Jack asked softly, "if I told you more about yourself, Baylis Ambrose? For I do remember you now. And you were very good."

"I was?"

"And would you believe it, Baylis, you once saved my life?"

"I—did?" Ambrose, apparently soothed by Jack's low-keyed delivery, lowered the revolver.

"You were in the cast of *Rose Bernd* with my sister Ethel in November, 1925. I'd just opened in *Hamlet* at the Sam Harris Theatre and she had the cast rush through the Hauptmann play one night so she could come over to see the last act of *Hamlet*. You accompanied her and arrived during the scene in which I ran Polonius through with the dagger behind the arras. I still have the dagger. Would you like to see it?"

Jack quickly opened a drawer in the desk and took out a small gold-plated weapon which gleamed in the sunshine from the window. He held it in front of him like a cross.

"May I touch it?" Jack held out the dagger and Ambrose touched it reverently.

"You asked the same favor the night you and Ethel came backstage to my dressing room. Ethel praised your work in *Rose Bernd*, and said your career was on the upswing, provided you could lay off the drink."

With a sob Ambrose's head fell on his breast.

"Don't feel so bad, Baylis. I often have had the same trouble myself. I said as much that night and I handed you a box of chocolates which had just been delivered to my dressing room. I advised you that eating sweets sometimes helped to repress the other craving. You said you would share the box with your wife."

"I—wish—I could remember. I can't. Not even my wife."

"Perhaps it's better that you don't. You can make a new start now, with no backward looks."

"But you said I saved your life."

"You did. The chocolates were poisoned."

"Why would you give me a box of poisoned candy?"

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"I didn't know it was poisoned. The card inside said, 'From an unknown admirer.' I took two pieces out of the box for luck and put them on my dressing-room table. You carried the rest home to your wife—her name is Sylvia, remember?—and her dog got into the chocolates before either of you could sample the box. The dog died, and you called me. Fortunately, I had spilled some face powder on my two and had thrown them away. We called the police, who discovered that the chocolates were filled with enough arsenic to kill the whole cast of *Hamlet*."

"But who would try to poison you?"

"I've often asked myself that. Perhaps you can help me find an answer. If you do I'll tell you whatever you came to ask me."

Ambrose straightened in his chair.

"You'll tell me your secret?"

"If you help me to solve the problem."

"I'll try, I'll try!"

Jack sent me a look that I did not understand. He knew I could not get off the couch without drawing attention to myself. Then I saw him glance at the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece, and understood he was still playing for time; hoping, perhaps, to take advantage of the arrival of the express people due to pick up his steamer trunk. Meanwhile Baylis Ambrose, although clearly enthralled by Barrymore's honeyed speech, held the revolver in a hand that seemed to have a vigilance of its own.

"Two months before the opening of *Hamlet*," Jack said, "I was coached for the speaking of the role by Margaret Carrington on her Connecticut farm. One day I was sitting alone in the garden reading my Temple Edition and cursing the footnotes, when I heard a car drive up, and presently an odious young man with greenish skin popped out of the bushes.

" 'Mr. Barrymore,' he said, 'my name is Terrence Brown and I would like to become an actor.'

" 'So would many of the Whites of this world,' I said, 'as well as the Greens and the Blacks. What do you have that they haven't?'

" 'I have a great-grandfather whose name was Maurice Barrymore.'

" 'That's peculiar,' I said. 'That was my father's name. Is it possible we're related?'

" 'Only by aspiration, sir. I know your father's name was Herbert Blythe, but at the beginning of his career he saw an old playbill at the Hay-

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market Theatre in London with the name Maurice Barrymore on it, and he took that for his stage name. It's common knowledge in England, sir, where I was born. But Maurice Barrymore, the original, was my great-grandfather, who was also a fine actor.'

"'I'm sure he was. But it doesn't even make us distant cousins.'

"'Think how well your father did with that name, sir. And how well you've done, and your brother Lionel and your sister Ethel. I live for the stage, too. I've seen you in the role of Gloucester in *Richard* six times! We may not be related, Mr. Barrymore, but I consider that fact only incidental, for art is the only true brotherhood.'

"I think it was the daring impudence of the lad that appealed to me—not the fact that his great-grandfather's name was Barrymore, if it was, for he could have invented that bit. But I asked him for his address and told him I would think about it. Two months later I got him a job as a page boy at the Sam Harris Theatre."

Jack picked up the *Hamlet* dagger and looked at it.

"You must have been superstitious, Baylis Ambrose," he said. "Most actors are. I am superstitious about the number three—which seems to underlie my life pattern as much as genes and chromosomes. There are *three* Barrymores acting in the United States at this moment. I have had *three* careers in acting—two in the legitimate theatre, in comedy and tragedy, and one in motion pictures. Tomorrow I go on my honeymoon with my third wife—I *presume* I will, if my stars are favorable. Good things come to me in threes, as do the bad, and getting Terrence Brown a job as a page was the first of a series of three."

"He didn't work out?" Ambrose was fascinated, but I had the feeling the revolver in his hand would spurt flame if I so much as moved.

Jack sighed. "Before the end of the first fortnight Terrence Brown proved himself an unmitigated rascal. He cadged drinks from the actors after the show. He plundered their dressing rooms for money and jewelry—he stole a valuable signet ring from me. And he failed repeatedly to call me on stage in time. So I had him dismissed.

"The lad literally frothed at the mouth, 'I'll get you, Blythe,' he shouted at me. 'You thief of my great-grandfather's name! You'll never live to enjoy your fame!' For his threats I brought charges and they put him in the pokey for six

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months. That was the last I heard of him.

"But he'd started the fateful chain of three, you see. The second trouble came from an understudy, a high-keyed stripling by the name of Anthony Burroughs who, it turned out, was the overly dependent progeny of a stage mother. Faugh! I can see him now, backstage, fanning her when it grew too warm, like a eunuch lackey. And every time I played the closet scene with Hamlet's mother and queen—who was involved in the murder of Hamlet's father, you'll recall—I could hear young Burroughs grinding his teeth in the wings. For I played it as a love scene, which strengthened the motivation of Hamlet's revenge against his uncle; and each time I came offstage Burroughs would hiss in my ear, 'How can you play the *son* like that! It's incestuous, sickening, obscene! I cannot stand to watch it!'

"Night after night this went on. I suspect that Burroughs' mommy didn't like my interpretation any more than sonny did, until finally one night, on leaving the stage after what I thought was my best performance of that scene, Burroughs slapped me across the face. I hurled myself on him, pushing him into the fly ropes, wrapped a loose end around his neck, and damned near choked him to death before they peeled me off him. I had him fired at once. In a couple of days a note arrived from Burroughs saying that I had destroyed his career and I would have reason to regret it."

At this point Baylis Ambrose held up two fingers, as if he were giving a bravura performance.

"Right," said Jack, "two down and one to go. But there was an interlude before the third."

Then Jack's tone softened, as if he'd forgotten he was stalling for time and was genuinely recalling a tender incident of the past.

"About this time a girl came back to my dressing room—a fair-haired goddess with lovely arms which were bare when she took off her cape. She sat near me at my dressing table and asked if I would make love to her. And before the night was out I lay at her side and sang: 'Holy, fair and wise is she; The heaven such grace did lend her, That she might admired be.' "

Jack fingered the thin line of his mustache ruefully.

"Unfortunately this girl drank like a boilermaker. She beckoned me to come off the wagon and join her, so that I became unholy and unwise. So to save *Hamlet* I had to give up

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Venus, but with my promise to renew our relationship after the run of the play.

"And finally, as I approached the fortieth performance of *Hamlet*—I always seem to tire of my stage roles around the sixtieth—there came a knock on my dressing-room door and four elderly men, not one under seventy, entered like pallbearers.

"Three of them looked very gentle, but the fourth, their spokesman, was a firebrand.

" 'Mr. Barrymore,' he said, 'we respect your stature as a great tragedian, and you will always occupy a sacred niche in the hall of Shakespearean actors. We know, if you wished, you could go on playing *Hamlet* on Broadway for years. But we are here, sir, to ask you to close your run at the end of the ninety-ninth performance.'

" 'And why do you pick ninety-nine?' I asked. 'Why not a hundred and ninety-nine?'

" 'Out of respect for the Master, Edwin Booth, the greatest Shakespearean actor of them all.'

" 'How many performances did Booth play?'

" 'Edwin Booth played on Broadway, sir, exactly one hundred successive performances.'

" 'I do not see why I should bow to the past,' I said. 'I respect my own performance of the Prince no less than Booth respected his. I knew him when I was a little boy, you know, and I think he would not wish me to defer to him now, in my own generation. Different times, different interpretations. You live in the past, gentlemen; do not expect me to live there with you. I shall present *Hamlet* on Broadway exactly one hundred and *one* times! Good day, gentlemen.'

"As the delegation solemnly left my dressing room the spokesman turned and held up a bony finger, his eyes filled with a hate that made my flesh creep.

" 'You shall rue this day, Mr. Barrymore,' he said melodramatically.

"Three days later I received the box of chocolates, and that evening I gave them to you, with the results you already know. Now then, Baylis Ambrose, suppose you tell me who tried to murder me. Was it the leader of the Edwin Booth delegation? The mother-loving Anthony Burroughs? Or was it Terrence Brown, the page boy who claimed his great-grandfather was named Barrymore?"

Ambrose rubbed his brow, but before he could answer, the telephone on Jack's desk rang and he picked it up casually. Ambrose raised his revolver.

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"My wife calling, I believe," Jack said. "May I?"

Ambrose nodded.

"Winkie? Yes, darling, I'm packed . . . I'm just sitting here at my desk thinking of you . . . Tell your mother we'll meet her in Wilmington. Sober? I promised you, didn't I?"

From a distance I could hear a truck grinding its gears as it climbed the hill. I cursed my throbbing ankle and moved restlessly. Ambrose glanced in my direction and then back at Jack. Jack put down the phone.

"Well?" asked Jack. "Can you solve the mystery?"

"Terrence Brown was put in jail for six months, you said. He must have been there all through the run of *Hamlet.*"

"He was."

"Then it couldn't have been Brown. He could scarcely have sent a box of poisoned chocolates from a jail cell."

"Excellent!"

"As for the spokesman of the Shakespearean Society," Ambrose said slowly, as if he were finding the concentration difficult, "is it likely that such an elderly man, having approached senility in a tradition-bound life, should become a murderer overnight?"

"A strong argument," Jack admitted, "but not conclusive. A fanatic can be triggered—excuse the expression—by a motivation that seems negligible to the rest of us. But let me put your mind at rest. When I called the gentleman in question to apologize for my bluntness, I discovered he died two days before I received the chocolates."

"Then it must have been the understudy. He had motive."

"But had lost his cue for passion, I think. He had managed meanwhile to get an acting contract in England, and had gone there with his mother. He wrote me a letter telling me that his dismissal from the company had been the best thing for his career, and he apologized for having attacked me."

"That leaves no one," Baylis said mournfully.

"Except the girl," I said, straining my ears for the sound of the truck.

"Ah!" Jack was smiling.

"Then you did not tell me everything!" Ambrose cried. "You probably were not too gentle with her when you sent her away."

"It's true we did not part the best of friends, but I don't think—"

"But it must have been she who sent the candy! Who else was there? Now, Mr. Barrymore, I've helped you. You must now tell me your secret, as you promised."

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"What secret have I?"

Ambrose was suddenly screaming. "The secret of your youth! You found it, didn't you—the fountain, the spring—somewhere in Baja California!"

I stared, aghast at Ambrose's sudden transition from a quiet-spoken, rational creature to a raving lunatic. For the first time Jack's façade grew thin, and his eyes had a wary look.

"My studio age is always thirty-seven. Actually, I'm forty-six. So I have no secret, old man."

"But look at you! You are young! You must have found it when you sailed on the *Gypsy* off the California coast two years ago. Ponce de Leon looked for it on the isle of Bimini, but you found it, didn't you, in a secret cove of the Pacific? Oh, I've read all about you, Mr. Barrymore. You have spent life like a prodigal, as I have. You have drunk to excess, as I have. You have wallowed in the gutter, as I have. And yet you stay vital and young, while I have withered. But I must have my chance! Tell me where you found it."

At that moment a uniformed policeman stepped through the French window, his revolver drawn, and the double doors from the vestibule swung open to reveal two more armed officers.

Baylis Ambrose screamed and threw his gun onto the parquetry.

"It's empty!" he shouted.

"No need to fire, gentlemen," Jack said. The policemen holstered their revolvers.

Jack turned to me. "That wasn't my wife who phoned. It was your boss, Henry Hotchener, who told me he wanted to speak to you. He guessed something was wrong from the way I answered and notified the police."

There was a sudden movement. Baylis Ambrose had leaped toward Jack's desk, picked up the *Hamlet* dagger, and now plunged it into his breast.

And as we all watched without moving a muscle, he died.

I didn't see Jack again for several years after he left on his third honeymoon. But it was my job, while he was gone, since Hotchener had to make a trip East, to keep accounts of the work being done on the grounds of Jack's Tower Road estate. Hundreds of tons of topsoil were trucked in to cover the rocky hills; lawns were planted, along with trees and shrubs, among which was a dwarf Japanese cedar which cost Jack over $1,000, and an ancient tree from Palestine.

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Meanwhile the papers had picked up the story about Baylis Ambrose. He had indeed once been a promising actor on Broadway, had then failed to click in the silents, and had taken a desk job with Standard Oil. His wife and child had been drowned in the March flood, and his home destroyed; they had found him wandering mindlessly on the streets of Beverly Hills and had committed him to the state institution at Orange. There psychiatrists had filled him in on his past, to which he seemed to have no access, but he had talked, before his escape, of resuming his career as an actor.

Barrymore returned from his honeymoon in March of 1929. Within a few months he was in a hospital with gastric ulcers, his first major illness. After that I began to see squibs in the newspapers about him: *Barrymore Arrested for Drunken Driving. Barrymore in Bistro Fight. Barrymore Slugs Registered Nurse.* Hotchener hinted that all was not roses in the Barrymore ménage.

By 1933 his third marriage was on the point of termination and the first evidence of his loss of memory had shown up on the sound stage of Universal Studios where, after fifty takes, he still could not remember his lines. He fled the pressures of his life to England, where he made an attempt to revive *Hamlet* on the screen in technicolor; but once again his memory failed him, and the project was canceled.

By this time I had left Hotchener's employ to set up on my own as an actors' agent, and having heard of an Anglo-Indian actress whose star was rising, I sailed for India in December of 1934. By the time I reached Bombay, my quarry was visiting her parents in Madras, so I trekked there, only to find that the Anglo-Indian actress had no intention of leaving her homeland.

I was sitting dejectedly in a bar in Madras when Barrymore wandered in. He was in an alcoholic miasma and looking decidedly the worse for wear. Characteristically he underplayed his surprise by casually ordering a drink and then speaking to me out of the side of his mouth.

"I'm being hunted by Dacca spies. Don't say you've seen me."

He told me presently that he'd come to India to take the Ayruvedic treatment under a Dr. Srinivasa Murti, which aimed at curing, among other things, his alcoholism and his faulty memory.

"For six weeks I've been living like a monk in some

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God-forsaken ashram, eating vegetables and drinking *water*, and I've finally rebelled. Now fortune has smiled and I've found a drinking companion."

We exchanged reminiscenses, until finally I brought the talk around to Baylis Ambrose.

"I've thought a lot about that day," Barrymore said, "and Baylis was right, you know. I did have a secret course of rejuvenation. My *retreats*. A decade ago I took two years out in a New York apartment to get my upper and lower parts in sync. Lived alone most of the time and just healed up. Later, when I came to Hollywood, I bought a yacht and sailed the coast of Baja California and found myself again.

"This flight to India and Dr. Murti is my third retreat—and the final one, I think. I have felt good again, but I know it cannot last. The other day I was sitting in an automobile when an old yogi tapped my arm and told me that I should remain here in India, since it was where I belonged. My father was born here, you know. He said if I stayed, I would be happy, but if I left— Then he wouldn't tell me any more, although I think he could if he'd wanted to. He wouldn't take any money."

Barrymore stared at his image in the bar glass.

"You know, I think I'm getting to look a little like Baylis Ambrose."

"I've always wondered about that day he broke in," I said. "He was exactly what he said he was. But you were stalling for time, and it has since occurred to me that you might have invented that story about the poisoned chocolates."

"No, that was the truth. All of it."

"And it was the girl who sent them?"

"She was never that angry with me."

"Who, then?"

Jack sat quietly for so long that I thought he hadn't heard me. Then he said, "I knew I was putting myself in danger by baiting Ambrose, but I couldn't help it. I had to know if he had really forgotten his past, or was just putting on an act. I fed him clues that should have produced sparks—like those sparks that Hamlet got from his uncle when he presented the play within the play; but Ambrose's memory was dead, really dead. Even when I quoted from that poem from Shakespeare, he didn't react."

"Should he have?"

"If he were lucid, and if I were right."

"Right about what?"

"Didn't you recognize *Who Is Sylvia?* Sylvia was the name of Ambrose's wife. And Am-

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brose's wife was the girl in the story, and I think when he found out about us, *he* sent me those poisoned chocolates."

"But you gave them back to him."

"In all innocence, remember. It was only later that I came to suspect him. I was never really sure. He could have made up the story about the poisoned dog."

"And you still don't know?"

"*Who else was there?*"

John Barrymore stared into the bar glass for a long time.

"Without his memory," he said finally, "Baylis Ambrose was a dead man. You can't ask questions of the dead."

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a MISS MARPLE detective story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

Here is an Agatha Christie story that is typical on three counts: it is a typical Miss Marple story; it is a typical Agatha Christie story in her most authentic vein—the tale of a village murder—to quote Miss Marple, "an old-fashioned crime"; and it is a typical Agatha Christie story in that it appears so simple and so straightforward, but—typically—you will find the simplicity deceptive (and how Agatha Christie can be deceptive!) and the straightforwardness decidedly devious . . .

VILLAGE MURDER

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

Miss Politt took hold of the knocker and rapped politely on the cottage door. After a discreet interval she knocked again. The parcel under her left arm shifted a little as she did so, and she readjusted it. Inside the parcel was Mrs. Spenlow's new green winter dress, ready for fitting. From Miss Politt's left hand dangled a bag of black silk, containing a tape measure, a pincushion, and a large practical pair of scissors.

Miss Politt was tall and gaunt, with a sharp nose, pursed lips, and meager iron-gray hair. She hesitated before using the knocker for the third time. Glancing down the street she saw a figure rapidly approaching. Miss Hartnell, jolly, weatherbeaten, 55, shouted out in her usual loud bass voice, "Good afternoon, Miss Politt!"

The dressmaker answered, "Good afternoon, Miss Hartnell." Her voice was excessively thin and genteel in its accents. She had started life as a lady's maid. "Excuse me," she went on, "but do you happen to know if by any chance Mrs. Spenlow isn't at home?"

"Not the least idea," said Miss Hartnell.

"It's rather awkward, you see. I was to fit on Mrs. Spenlow's new dress—at three thirty, she said."

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Miss Hartnell consulted her wrist watch. "It's a little past the half hour now."

"Yes. I have knocked three times, but there doesn't seem to be any answer, so I was wondering if perhaps Mrs. Spenlow might have gone out and forgotten. She doesn't forget appointments as a rule, and she wants the dress to wear the day after tomorrow."

Miss Hartnell entered the gate and walked up the path to join Miss Politt outside the door of Laburnam Cottage.

"Why doesn't Gladys answer the door?" she demanded. "Oh, no, of course, it's Thursday—Gladys' day out. I expect Mrs. Spenlow has fallen asleep. I don't expect you've made enough noise with this thing."

Seizing the knocker she executed a deafening *rat-a-tat-tat*, and in addition thumped on the panels of the door. She also called out in a stentorian voice, "What ho, within there!"

There was no response.

Miss Politt murmured, "Oh, I think Mrs. Spenlow must have forgotten and gone out. I'll call round some other time." She began edging away.

"Nonsense," said Miss Hartnell firmly. "She can't have gone out. I'd have met her. I'll just take a look through the windows and see if I can find any signs of life."

She laughed in her usual hearty manner, to indicate that it was a joke, and applied a perfunctory glance to the nearest windowpane—perfunctory because she knew quite well that the front room was seldom used, Mr. and Mrs. Spenlow preferring the small back sitting room.

Perfunctory as it was, though, it succeeded in its object. Miss Hartnell, it is true, saw no signs of life. On the contrary she saw, through the window, Mrs. Spenlow lying on the hearthrug—dead.

"Of course," said Miss Hartnell, telling the story afterward, "I managed to keep my head. That Politt creature wouldn't have had the least idea of what to do. 'Got to keep our heads,' I said to her. '*You* stay here and I'll go for Constable Palk.' She said something about not wanting to be left alone, but I paid no attention at all. One has to be firm with that sort of person. I've always found they enjoy making a fuss. So I was just going off when, at that very moment, Mr. Spenlow came round the corner of the house."

Here Miss Hartnell made a significant pause. It enabled her audience to ask breathlessly, "Tell me, how did he *look?*" Miss Hartnell would then go on, "Frankly, *I* suspected some-

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thing at once! He was *far* too calm. He didn't seem surprised in the least. And you may say what you like, it isn't natural for a man to hear that his wife is dead and display no emotion whatever."

Everybody agreed with this statement.

The police agreed with it, too. So suspicious did they consider Mr. Spenlow's detachment that they lost no time in ascertaining how that gentleman was situated as a result of his wife's death. When they discovered that Mrs. Spenlow had been the monied partner, and that her money went to her husband under a will made soon after their marriage, they were more suspicious than ever.

Miss Marple, that sweet-faced (and some said vinegar-tongued) elderly spinster who lived in the house next to the rectory, was interviewed very early—within half an hour of the discovery of the crime. She was approached by Police Constable Palk, importantly thumbing a notebook. "If you don't mind, ma'am, I've a few questions to ask you."

Miss Marple said, "In connection with the murder of Mrs. Spenlow?"

Palk was startled. "May I ask, madam, how you got to know of it?"

"The fish," said Miss Marple.

The reply was perfectly intelligible to Constable Palk. He assumed correctly that the fishmonger's boy had brought the news, together with Miss Marple's evening meal.

Miss Marple continued gently, "Lying on the floor in the sitting room, strangled—possibly by a very narrow belt. But whatever it was, it was taken away."

Palk's face was wrathful. "How that young Fred gets to know everything—"

Miss Marple cut him short adroitly. She said, "There's a pin in your tunic."

Constable Palk looked down, startled. He said, "They do say: 'See a pin and pick it up, all the day you'll have good luck.' "

"I hope that will come true. Now what is it you want me to tell you?"

Constable Palk cleared his throat, looked important, and consulted his notebook. "Statement was made to me by Mr. Arthur Spenlow, husband of the deceased. Mr. Spenlow says that at two thirty, as far as he can say, he was rung up by Miss Marple and asked if he would come over at a quarter past three as she was anxious to consult him about something. Now, ma'am, is that true?"

"Certainly not," said Miss Marple.

"You did not ring up Mr

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Spenlow at two thirty?"

"Neither at two thirty nor any other time."

"Ah," said Constable Palk and sucked his mustache with a good deal of satisfaction.

"What else did Mr. Spenlow say?"

"Mr. Spenlow's statement was that he came over here as requested, leaving his own house at ten minutes past three; that on arrival here he was informed by the maid-servant that Miss Marple was 'not at 'ome.' "

"That part of it is true," said Miss Marple. "He did come here, but I was at a meeting at the Women's Institute."

"Ah," said Constable Palk again.

Miss Marple exclaimed, "Do tell me, Constable, do you suspect Mr. Spenlow?"

"It's not for me to say at this stage, but it looks to me as though somebody, naming no names, had been trying to be artful."

Miss Marple said thoughtfully, "Mr. Spenlow?"

She liked Mr. Spenlow. He was a small spare man, stiff and conventional in speech, the acme of respectability. It seemed odd that he should have come to live in the country, he had so clearly lived in towns all his life. To Miss Marple he confided the reason. He said, "I have always intended, ever since I was a small boy, to live in the country some day and have a garden of my own. I have always been very much attached to flowers. My wife, you know, kept a flower shop. That's where I saw her first."

A dry statement, but it opened up a vista of romance. A younger, prettier Mrs. Spenlow, seen against a background of flowers.

Mr. Spenlow, however, really knew nothing about flowers. He had no idea of seeds, cuttings, bedding out, of annuals or perennials. He had only a vision—a vision of a small cottage garden thickly planted with sweet-smelling, brightly colored blossoms. He had asked, almost pathetically, for instruction, and had noted down Miss Marple's replies in a little book.

He was a man of quiet method. It was, perhaps, because of this trait that the police were interested in him when his wife was found murdered. With patience and perseverance they learned a good deal about the late Mrs. Spenlow—and soon all St. Mary Mead knew it, too.

The late Mrs. Spenlow had begun life as a between-maid in a large house. She had left that position to marry the second gardener, and with him had

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started a flower shop in London. The shop had prospered. Not so the gardener, who before long had sickened and died.

His widow carried on the shop and enlarged it in an ambitious way. She had continued to prosper. Then she had sold the business at a handsome price and embarked upon matrimony for the second time—with Mr. Spenlow, a middle-aged jeweler, who had inherited a small and struggling business. Not long afterward, they had sold the business and come down to St. Mary Mead.

Mrs. Spenlow was a well-to-do woman. The profits from her florist's establishment she had invested—"under spirit guidance," as she explained to all and sundry. The spirits had advised her with unexpected acumen.

All her investments had prospered, some in quite a sensational fashion. Instead, however, of this increasing her belief in spiritualism, Mrs. Spenlow basely deserted mediums and sittings, and made a brief but wholehearted plunge into an obscure religion with Indian affinities which was based on various forms of deep breathing. When, however, she arrived at St. Mary Mead, she had relapsed into a period of orthodox Church-of-England beliefs. She was a good deal at the Vicarage and attended church services with assiduity. She patronized the village shops, took an interest in the local happenings, and played village bridge.

A humdrum everyday life. And—suddenly—murder.

Colonel Melchett, the chief constable, had summoned Inspector Slack.

Slack was a positive type of man. When he had made up his mind, he was sure. He was quite sure now. "Husband did it, sir."

"You think so?"

"Sure of it. You've only got to look at him. Guilty as hell. Never showed a sign of grief or emotion. He came back to the house knowing she was dead."

"Wouldn't he at least have tried to act the part of the distracted husband?"

"Not him, sir. Too pleased with himself. Some gentlemen can't act. Too stiff."

"Any other woman in his life?" Colonel Melchett asked.

"Haven't been able to find any trace of one. Of course he's the artful kind. He'd cover his tracks. As I see it, he was just fed up with his wife. She'd got the money and I should say was a trying woman to live with—always taking up some 'ism' or other. He cold-bloodedly decided to do away with her

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and live comfortably on his own."

"Yes, that could be the case, I suppose."

"Depend upon it, that was it. Made his plans careful. Pretended to get a phone call—"

Melchett interrupted him, "No call been traced?"

"No, sir. That means either that he lied or that the call was put through from a public telephone booth. The only two public phones in the village are at the station and the post office. Post office it certainly wasn't. Mrs. Blade sees everyone who comes in. Station it might be. Train arrives at two twenty-seven and there's a bit of a bustle then. But the main thing is *he* says it was Miss Marple who called him up, and that certainly isn't true. The call didn't come from her house, and she herself was away at the Institute."

"You're not overlooking the possibility that the husband was deliberately got out of the way—by someone who wanted to murder Mrs. Spenlow?"

"You're thinking of young Ted Gerard, aren't you, sir? I've been working on him—what we're up against there is lack of motive. He doesn't stand to gain anything."

"He's an undesirable character, though. Quite a spot of embezzlement to his credit."

"I'm not saying he isn't a wrong 'un. Still, he did go to his boss and own up to that embezzlement. And his employers weren't wise to it."

"An Oxford Grouper," said Melchett.

"Yes, sir. Became a convert and went off to do the straight thing and own up to having pinched money. I'm not saying, mind you, that it mayn't have been astuteness—he may have thought he was suspected and decided to gamble on seemingly honest repentance."

"You have a skeptical mind, Slack," said Colonel Melchett. "By the way, have you talked to Miss Marple at all?"

"What's *she* got to do with it, sir?"

"Oh, nothing. But she hears things, you know. Why don't you go and have a chat with her? She's a very sharp old lady."

Slack changed the subject. "One thing I've been meaning to ask you, sir. That domestic-service job where the deceased started her career—Sir Robert Abercrombie's place. That's where that jewel robbery was—emeralds—worth a packet. Never got them. I've been looking it up—must have happened when the Spenlow woman was there, though she'd have been quite a girl at the time. Don't think she was

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mixed up in it, do you, sir? Spenlow, you know, was one of those little tuppenny-ha'penny jewelers—just the chap for a fence."

Melchett shook his head. "Don't think there's anything in that. She didn't even know Spenlow at the time. I remember the case. Opinion in police circles was that a son of the house was mixed up in it—Jim Abercrombie—awful young waster. Had a pile of debts and just after the robbery they were all paid off—some rich woman, so they said, but I don't know. Old Abercrombie hedged a bit about the case—tried to call the police off."

"It was just an idea, sir," said Slack.

Miss Marple received Inspector Slack with gratification, especially when she heard that he had been sent by Colonel Melchett.

"Now, really, that is very kind of Colonel Melchett. I didn't know he remembered me."

"He remembers you, all right. Told me that what you didn't know of what goes on in St. Mary Mead isn't worth knowing."

"Too kind of him, but really I don't know anything at all. About this murder, I mean."

"You know what the talk about it is."

"Oh, of course—but it wouldn't do, would it, to repeat just idle talk?"

Slack said, with an attempt at geniality, "This isn't an official conversation, you know. It's in confidence, so to speak."

"You mean you really want to know what people are saying? Whether there's any truth in it or not?"

"That's the idea."

"Well, of course, there's been a great deal of talk and speculation. And there are really two distinct camps, if you understand me. To begin with, there are the people who think the husband did it. A husband or a wife is, in a way, the natural person to suspect, don't you think so?"

"Maybe," said the Inspector cautiously.

"Such close quarters, you know. Then, so often, the money angle. I hear that it was Mrs. Spenlow who had the money and therefore Mr. Spenlow does benefit by her death. In this wicked world I'm afraid the most uncharitable assumptions are often justified."

"He comes into a tidy sum, all right."

"Just so. It would seem quite plausible, wouldn't it, for

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him to strangle her, leave the house by the back, come across the fields to my house, ask for me and pretend he'd had a telephone call from me, then go back and find his wife murdered in his absence—hoping, of course, that the crime would be put down to some tramp or burglar."

The Inspector nodded. "What with the money angle—and if they'd been on bad terms lately—"

But Miss Marple interrupted him, "Oh, but they hadn't."

"You know that for a fact?"

"Everyone would have known if they'd quarreled! The maid, Gladys Brent—she'd have soon spread it round."

The Inspector said feebly, "She mightn't have known—" and received a pitying smile in reply.

Miss Marple went on, "And then there's the other school of thought. Ted Gerard. A good-looking young man. I'm afraid, you know, that good looks are inclined to influence one more than they should. Our last curate but one—quite a magical effect! All the girls came to church—evening service as well as morning. And many older women became unusually active in parish work—and the slippers and scarves that were made for him! Quite embarrassing for the poor young man.

"But let me see, where was I? Oh, yes, this young man Ted Gerard. Of course, there has been talk about him. He's come down to see her so often. Though Mrs. Spenlow told me herself that he was a member of what I think they call the Oxford Group. A religious movement. They are quite sincere and very earnest, I believe, and Mrs. Spenlow was impressed by it all."

Miss Marple took a breath and went on, "And I'm sure there was no reason to believe that there was anything more in it than that, but you know what people are. Quite a lot of people are convinced that Mrs. Spenlow was infatuated with the young man, and that she'd lent him quite a lot of money. And it's perfectly true that he was actually seen at the station that day. In the train—the two twenty-seven down train. But of course it would be quite easy, wouldn't it, to slip out of the other side of the train and go through the cutting and over the fence and round by the hedge and never come out of the station entrance at all. So that he need not have been seen going to the cottage. And of course people do think that what Mrs. Spenlow was wearing was rather peculiar."

"Peculiar?"

"A kimono. Not a dress."

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Miss Marple blushed. "That sort of thing, you know, is, perhaps, rather suggestive to some people."

"You think it was suggestive?"

"Oh, no, *I* don't think so. I think it was perfectly natural."

"You think it was natural?"

"Under the circumstances, yes." Miss Marple's glance was cool and reflective.

Inspector Slack said, "It might give us another motive for the husband. Jealousy."

"Oh, no, Mr. Spenlow would never be jealous. He's not the sort of man who notices things. If his wife had gone away and left a note on the pincushion, it would be the first he'd know of anything of that kind."

Inspector Slack was puzzled by the intent way she was looking at him. He had an idea that all her conversation was intended to hint at something he didn't understand. She said now, with some emphasis, "Didn't *you* find any clues, Inspector—on the spot?"

"People don't leave fingerprints and cigarette ash nowadays, Miss Marple."

"But this, I think," she suggested, "was an old-fashioned crime—"

Slack said sharply, "Now what do you mean by that?"

Miss Marple remarked slowly, "I think, you know, that Constable Palk could help you. He was the first person on the—on the 'scene of the crime,' as they say."

Mr. Spenlow was sitting in a deck chair. He looked bewildered. He said, in his thin precise voice, "I may, of course, be imagining what occurred. My hearing is not as good as it was. But I distinctly think I heard a small boy call after me, 'Yah, who's a Crippen?' It conveyed the impression to me that he was of the opinion that I had—had killed my dear wife."

Miss Marple, gently snipping off a dead rose head, said, "That was the impression he meant to convey, no doubt."

"But what could possibly have put such an idea into a child's head?"

Miss Marple coughed. "Listening, no doubt, to the opinions of his elders."

"You—you really mean that other people think that also?"

"Quite half the people in St. Mary Mead."

"But—my dear lady—what can possibly have given rise to such an idea? I was sincerely attached to my wife. She did not, alas, take to living in the country as much as I had hoped she would do, but perfect agreement on every subject is an impossible ideal. I assure you I feel her loss very keenly."

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"Probably. But if you will excuse my saying so, you don't sound as though you do."

Mr. Spenlow drew his meager frame up to its full height. "My dear lady, many years ago I read of a certain Chinese philosopher who, when his dearly loved wife was taken from him, continued calmly to beat a gong in the street—a customary Chinese pastime, I presume—exactly as usual. The people of the city were much impressed by his fortitude."

"But," said Miss Marple, "the people of St. Mary Mead react rather differently. Chinese philosophy does not appeal to them."

"But you understand?"

Miss Marple nodded. "My Uncle Henry," she explained, "was a man of unusual self-control. His motto was 'Never display emotion.' He, too, was very fond of flowers."

"I was thinking," said Mr. Spenlow with something like eagerness, "that I might, perhaps, have a pergola on the west side of the cottage. Pink roses and, perhaps, wisteria. And there is a white starry flower, whose name for the moment escapes me—"

In the tone in which she spoke to her grandnephew, aged three, Miss Marple said, "I have a very nice catalogue here, with pictures. Perhaps you would like to look through it—I have to go up to the village."

Leaving Mr. Spenlow sitting happily in the garden with his catalogue, Miss Marple went up to her room, hastily rolled up a dress in a piece of brown paper, and, leaving the house, walked briskly up to the post office. Miss Politt, the dressmaker, lived in rooms over the post office.

But Miss Marple did not at once go through the door and up the stairs. It was just 2:30, and, a minute late, the Much Benham bus drew up outside the post-office door. It was one of the events of the day in St. Mary Mead. The postmistress hurried out with parcels—parcels connected with the shop side of her business, for the post office also dealt in sweets, books, and children's toys.

For some four minutes Miss Marple was alone in the post office.

Not till the postmistress returned did Miss Marple go upstairs and explain to Miss Politt that she wanted her old gray crepe altered and made more fashionable if that were possible. Miss Politt promised to see what she could do.

The chief constable was rather astonished when Miss Marple's name was brought to him. She came in with many

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apologies. "So sorry—so very sorry to disturb you. You are so busy, I know, but then you have always been so very kind, Colonel Melchett, and I felt I would rather come to you instead of to Inspector Slack. For one thing, you know, I should hate Constable Palk to get into any trouble. Strictly speaking, I suppose he shouldn't have touched anything at all."

Colonel Melchett was slightly bewildered. He said, "Palk? That's the St. Mary Mead constable, isn't it? What has he been doing?"

"He picked up a pin, you know. It was in his tunic. And it occurred to me at the time that it was quite probable he had actually picked it up in Mrs. Spenlow's house."

"Quite, quite. But after all, you know, what's a pin? Matter of fact he did pick the pin up just by Mrs. Spenlow's body. Came and told Slack about it yesterday—you put him up to that, I gather? Oughtn't to have touched anything, of course, but as I said, what's a pin? It was only a common pin. Sort of thing any woman might use."

"Oh, no, Colonel Melchett, that's where you're wrong. To a man's eye, perhaps, it looked like an ordinary pin, but it wasn't. It was a special pin, a very thin pin, the kind you buy by the box, the kind used mostly by dressmakers."

Melchett stared at her, a faint light of comprehension breaking in on him. Miss Marple nodded her head several times eagerly.

"Yes, of course. It seems to me so obvious. Mrs. Spenlow was in her kimono because she was going to try on her new dress, and she went into the front room, and Miss Politt just said something about measurements and put the tape measure round her neck—and then all she'd have to do was to cross it and pull—quite easy, so I've heard. And then of course she'd go outside and pull the door to and stand there knocking as though she'd just arrived. But the pin shows she'd *already been in the house.*"

"And it was Miss Politt who telephoned to Spenlow?"

"Yes. From the post office at two thirty—just when the bus comes and the post office would be empty."

Colonel Melchett said, "But my dear Miss Marple, why? In heaven's name, why? You can't have a murder without a motive."

"Well, I think, you know, Colonel Melchett, from all I've heard, that the crime dates from a long time back. It reminds me, you know, of my two cousins. Antony and

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Gordon. Whatever Antony did always went right for him, and with poor Gordon it was just the other way about: racehorses went lame, stocks went down, property depreciated . . . As I see it, the two women were in it together."

"In what?"

"The robbery. Long ago. Very valuable emeralds, so I've heard. The lady's maid and the tweeny. Because one thing hasn't been explained—how, when the tweeny married the gardener, did they have enough money to set up a flower shop?

"The answer is, it was her share of the—the swag, I think is the right expression. Everything she did turned out well. Money made money. But the other one, the lady's maid, must have been unlucky. She came down to being just a village dressmaker. Then they met again. Quite all right at first, I expect, until Mr. Ted Gerard came on the scene.

"Mrs. Spenlow, you see, was already suffering from conscience, and was inclined to be emotionally religious. This young man no doubt urged her to 'face up' and to 'come clean' and I daresay she was strung up to do so. But Miss Politt didn't see it that way. All she saw was that she might go to prison for a robbery she had committed years ago. So she made up her mind to put a stop to it all. I'm afraid, you know, that she was always rather a wicked woman. I don't believe she'd have turned a hair if that nice stupid Mr. Spenlow had been hanged."

Colonel Melchett said slowly, "We can—er—verify your theory—up to a point. The identity of the Politt woman with the lady's maid at the Abercrombies', but—"

Miss Marple reassured him.

"It will be all quite easy. She's the kind of woman who will break down at once when she's taxed with the truth. And then, you see, I've got her tape measure. I—er—abstracted it yesterday when I was trying on. When she misses it and thinks the police have got it—well, she's quite an ignorant woman and she'll think it will prove the case against her in some way."

She smiled at him encouragingly. "You'll have no trouble, I can assure you." It was the tone in which his favorite aunt had once assured him that he could not fail to pass his entrance examination into Sandhurst.

And he had passed.

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This is the 378th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a contemporary story about the drug scene—at least, one view of it . . .

The author, Roger Westphal (a pseudonym), is in his early twenties, a graduate of Harvard, and, at the time of this writing, a second-year medical student.

"Last summer," the author wrote to us, "I found EQMM in a bookstore and discovered that it provides a refreshing contrast to my studies." Since then mysteries have become his only nonmedical reading. At the beginning of 1972 he decided that writing a mystery could be more fun than reading one. Well, we'll bet that selling a mystery is even more fun than reading or writing one! . . .

SUMMER JOB

by ROGER WESTPHAL

I was glad the summer was almost over. I could hardly wait to be free to shave my beard, trim my hair, and wash my blue jeans.

I hadn't wanted to come South, especially to a resort on the ocean. Once I got here I was even sorrier I'd agreed to come. For a week I had found nothing but heat and tourists. After I made a contact, I kept telling myself, things would look up.

I was wrong. The afternoon sun was hovering over the doughnut shop across the street, shining right in my eyes, and I couldn't see inside the shop. I'd have to cross the street for a better view, despite the warning from the long-haired souvenir peddler I'd met on the boardwalk that morning. He'd told me to wait at the magazine stand until the doughnut place was empty.

After dodging past the dune buggies, station wagons, and red convertibles cruising the street, and squinting against the glare, I could see there were some customers in the shop. I walked

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down the block to a real estate office ("Golden Investments For Your Golden Years") and turned back. An old woman carrying a bag of doughnuts was leaving as I went in.

No one was at the counter. Through the glass window on the door leading to the kitchen I could see a waitress talking to the cook. He was about my age, with longer hair and a thicker mustache, and he furnished living proof that the local Board of Health had stopped functioning during the tourist season. Fortunately I wasn't buying anything from him.

When the girl came out she nodded and waited for me to order. She must have figured me for the jelly-filled type, because she slid open the glass door behind that case. "Some raspberry today? They're still hot."

I shook my head. " 'Fraid not. Came for something else."

"What is it, then?"

"Glaze."

"How many?"

"Not doughnuts, just glaze." I smiled. "Sugar, sugar." It sounded ridiculous, but that's what the peddler on the boardwalk had told me to say. Besides, I'd been through sillier rituals in the past few months.

"You're new here, aren't you?" She didn't seem happy to greet a new customer.

"Yeah, got in a couple of nights ago. From up North, the Cape. Got a ride from D.C. with some guy in a van, said his name was Goofball."

I wanted to establish some credentials with the girl, in case she knew him. Goofball had acted like the kind who would be a regular customer here.

"Never heard of him. Why'd you come down here? The summer's almost over, and that's a pretty long trip from the Cape."

"I heard about your sugar. Gotta stock up for school, you know. Hard to get much on the Cape this year—too many Feds around. But snow falls in the South, too, doesn't it?"

"Just a minute." She turned to go in the kitchen. "I'll talk to the weatherman."

A few minutes later she came back and handed me a slip of paper. "Go there tonight after ten. There'll be a party. One of the guys is named Samson. Talk with him."

"Thanks a lot." I tried to sound grateful. "Any chance I might see you there?" She was too old for me, even if I'd been in the mood to pick up a waitress. But it's always good business practice to be friendly with the people you deal with.

She lit a cigarette before she answered me. "Beat it, mister. Go find your sugar."

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The address she gave me was at the northern end of the beach, beyond the motels, where rich people from other parts of the state have their summer homes. I caught a ride with a lonely high-school kid on a motorcycle. He wanted me to take him to the party and got angry when I refused. He didn't realize what a favor I was doing him.

He let me off at a private road which ran all the way out to the sand dunes, where the beach started. A few modest white cottages were packed in at the head of the road. Closer to the beach the houses became more impressive. Most of the places were dark, but the house where I was going was pulsing with colored lights. It sat at the end of the road, perched on a dune, overlooking the ocean.

I noticed the name on the mailbox. It was the same one I'd seen on the huge shoe store in the shopping center near my motel.

I opened the gate in the white picket fence and climbed the steps to the brick patio. A heart-shaped swimming pool glimmered between me and the house. I walked around to the door on the screen porch and went in.

"Hey, man, join the crowd. Better yet, join me. I saw you first."

The porch was dark except for a deep red glow from a lamp inside the house. I couldn't see a body to go with the soft feminine voice.

"Hey, let your head go, like me. I'm flying so high, wow, so high." She giggled.

I looked up. Stretched diagonally from two corners of the ceiling was an oversized fishnet hammock. Inside it was a girl with long dark hair. She was propped up on her elbows and she looked young.

"Yep. You're flying all right." I grinned.

"Come on up." She giggled again. "Get your ticket and take a trip."

"Right on, sister." That was another thing I'd be glad to be finished with. The jargon was just too much. "Need to get my head in shape. A friend said you people could help me."

"You came to the right place." She was still giggling. "We've got all the medicine." She sat up, and I realized she was even younger than I'd thought. She'd probably been smoking banana peels and thought she was out of it.

"I'm looking for a guy named Samson."

"Who?" She stopped giggling.

"Samson. Is he here?"

"Yeah, inside. Everybody knows him. Such a colossal

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drag." She lay back in her hammock. Samson probably wouldn't supply young girls. No wonder she didn't like him.

About 30 people were sitting in the living room, talking and listening to a record by some sad-voiced singer. A few guys with fraternity shirts on were watching TV in another room. One girl gave me a beer, and a skinny blonde offered me a joint wrapped in American flag paper. I sat on the floor and finished both.

In a few minutes a short kid with bright red hair and a small red beard came downstairs and headed toward the kitchen. He had to be my man.

"Hey, friend, you know somebody named Samson?"

"Yeah, that's me." His eyes sparkled. "They send you from the doughnut shop?"

"That's right. Need to get my head fixed, you know, put it together."

We talked for a while about his supply. He claimed he could get anything in any quantity I wanted, so I figured he must be working with sailors at the Navy base a few miles away. Since it was my last score of the summer I decided to go for broke.

But when I told him what I wanted he swallowed hard. "That'll be an awful lot of money, it'll cost an awful lot." He narrowed his eyes, trying to size me up. "You got that much in cash?"

"Yeah, I'm representing a—you know, a cooperative back at school. We can't get anything much up north any more."

He nodded and went to the phone in the front hall. In a few minutes he came back grinning. "All set." He gave me another address and told me to be there at seven the next morning.

Practicing my friendly neighbor policy, I stayed at the party for a few more hours. Most of the girls went to an exclusive private school in another city. One of their classmates had invited them to spend a week at the beach. Nobody had seen her parents, but that was her little sister in the hammock.

The next morning I walked over to the cheap boarding-house Samson had told me about. The sun was up, and it was already uncomfortably hot. It would be another perfect day at the beach for all those fat tourists.

I went to the garage in the backyard and climbed the stairs. There were two apartments. I knocked on the door which had "George Wells" written on it. No answer. I knocked again. Still nothing. I banged on the door.

"Come on in, man, it's open."

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I walked in. Light was streaming through the window of the one-room apartment. Curled up in an old armchair was the cook from the doughnut shop. He had on a pair of headphones which were hooked to his stereo set. He didn't look any cleaner than he'd been the day before, but his apartment was spotless. He took off his headphones and put them on the arm of the chair.

"You got the cash?"

"Yeah, don't worry. You guys could have made it a lot easier for me. Why'd you send me up to that party if it was you I had to see?"

"We always like to check out our new friends, see how they fit in at social functions, you know? Besides, if we make it too easy, every cop in the beach would walk into the shop and ask for sugar." He paused. "You wanna see the stuff?"

I nodded. He went over to a pile of records on the floor, opened a double album, and from one of the record sleeves pulled out a plastic bag filled with white powder. It was, if reasonably pure, about $20,000 worth of cocaine. He put the bag back and handed me the album.

"Okay, you got the money?"

I reached in my pocket for my wallet, opened it, and gave it to him. "Sorry, George," I said gently, "but as the poet says, things are not what they seem. I'm an official undercover field agent of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs."

He looked at the identification card with my picture on it. I'm not supposed to use that, except in emergencies, but I always like to put the full majesty of the law behind me at the very beginning.

"You're a narc?" he whispered. He was stunned. They usually are. That's good, it's always easier for me when they take it hard like this.

"You won't, I'm sure, try any fast moves on me, George. My superior knows what motel I'm staying in, and I left a message there with full details of my activities here and my visit to you this morning."

He still looked numb, too numb to try to jump me. He tried to speak; finally some words came out in a small croaking voice. "You mean this is it? You're going to arrest me? I'm really being busted?" He fell back into his armchair. "This ruins everything, really screws up all my plans. I'm getting busted."

He was going to be even easier than I'd hoped. The harder they take it, the easier it

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is for me to handle them. "It's my summer job, George. I signed up at college last fall and trained during the spring." He still looked shocked. This was going very well.

I took out my pack of cigarettes. "I got a lot of good pictures of your friends last night, George." I clicked the fake pack to demonstrate the hidden camera. "My boss will be happy enough busting a group of silly rich girls whose parents don't take care of them." I lowered my voice. "He doesn't have to know about you."

George looked up. The color came back to his face. "You mean you'll make a deal?"

I nodded. "I'll take the sugar. Like I told Samson, I really do have business connections back at college. It'll be expensive for you, but"—I smiled—"all things considered, I think you'll agree the loss is worth it."

He stared at me for a minute. Then a huge grin broke out on his hairy face. "Oh, man, oh, I don't believe it. You just don't know what this means to me."

"I know, George."

"No, man, you really don't."

"Sure I do."

"No, really, man. You see, I spent a long time setting this operation up."

I nodded. I was ready to leave, while he was still happy.

"No, you see this is my first assignment for the city's police intelligence division. The Feds had a tip you were crooked, and my boss asked me to take care of it. When I thought you were really going to arrest me I just about died. I thought I'd blown it somehow, I really did.

"All the kids at the beach helped set me up because I told them I wanted to expose a narc who'd busted my fraternity brothers out in the Midwest. They were waiting for you."

He laughed at his own ingenuity. "I sent you up to Samson so he could make sure you were the guy we wanted. He's our real undercover agent here—helps the kids stay out of trouble."

Then George reached over to his cassette deck and pulled out a tape. "Anyway, thanks for explaining it all to me." He sounded triumphant.

I turned and opened his door. A uniformed policeman stood outside. I turned again and looked at his window. The closet door opened and another cop came out.

I started feeling very weak.

"Hey, man," I heard George's voice from far away. "Don't drop the record. You'll spill powdered sugar all over my floor."

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This is the 379th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a low-key, restrained story, but under the skin, a volcano ready to erupt . . .

The author, Marie DiGioia, is a native New Yorker who spent much of her childhood on a farm in Brooklyn. She studied to be an artist, but forgot that ambition when a story she wrote appeared in her high-school magazine. Since then she has "accumulated the usual amount of stories and half-finished novels."

"In the real world" (an unusual way of expressing it), she enjoys traveling, the theater, bowling, tennis, and perhaps most of all, "being with creative people" . . .

THE LAST CONTRACT

by MARIE DiGIOIA

The warm desert air engulfed him as he leaned toward the open window and focused his binoculars on the white clapboard building on the opposite side of the street. In one of the screen-covered windows was a sign: *Dr. Horace Hanley, M.D.* A man in cowboy duds came out, carrying a little girl with tear-stained eyes. Then she appeared. She wore her blonde hair in a casual shoulder-length style and had deep-set, sad-looking eyes and a slender figure that made her seem curiously fragile—so that for a fleeting moment Malloy wished he hadn't been given the contract.

She stood in the doorway, glancing warily about her. Then she walked quickly down the street to a nearby coffee shop and vanished inside. Malloy tossed the binoculars into the duffel bag, then reached inside his suitcase to finger the .38 revolver lying under his clothing. He locked the suitcase and put it and the duffel bag into the closet. Finally he slipped a piece of cardboard under the door and closed it behind him.

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There wasn't anyone else out on the street. It was as if the whole town of Reamore, Arizona, population 1573, had curled up within itself like a snail until the anonymity of evening made it safe for the residents to come out of their shell. The blazing sun beat down on him and he quickened his step as he drew near the service station.

A heavy-set man in grease-stained coveralls sat inside the garage, sipping a soft drink.

"You must be Rick Malloy. Jim Turner here." The big man offered his hand. "Pete Hanson tells me you can pinch hit while my regular grease monkey's laid up. For a one-horse town you'd be surprised at all the traffic passing through here."

"Yeah, it's a regular Times Square." Malloy moved toward the exit. "I'll see you on Wednesday morning, okay?"

He walked back in the direction of the boardinghouse. The car he had bought at a used-car lot in Phoenix was parked on a side street and he got in, cursing as his body touched the burning seat. Then he drove away from the town.

He made his call from a telephone booth facing Highway 9.

"I'm here," Malloy announced after Hanson's gravel voice came over the wire, "and I've made contact with my cover."

"And how does the customer look to you?"

"Like a lame deer I once bagged in the Canadian woods. It got tired of running, too."

"So you've got yourself an easy mark. What could be better, your last time around?"

"Maybe a blind guy with a seeing-eye dog."

"Relax." Hanson laughed nervously. "Soon it'll be all over and you'll be back on the farm. Keep thinking about that."

"It's all I think about."

The cardboard was still under the door when he returned to his room. Stripping to the waist, he stretched out on the iron bed. Drifting off into semiconsciousness, he saw himself walking through the tall cornfields on the farm in Pennsylvania. It was May, and the crisp morning air filled his lungs.

Malloy got up abruptly and walked over to the bureau. He stared at the reflection of himself in the mirror, noting the deep lines under his eyes, the gray accenting his dark hair. The years of hard living had left their mark. He suddenly felt tired—an indefinable weariness he'd felt ever since he decided to leave the organization.

It hadn't been easy. As the

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old man had told him, competent gunmen were hard to find in these days of discontented, turned-on youth. For weeks the old man had exerted all the pressure of the organization to try to dissuade Malloy, but he had managed to stand firm. Finally the summons to visit the old man's home in San Francisco came, bringing about the confrontation Malloy had looked forward to and yet feared.

The living room was almost the same as he remembered it when he had first entered it more than 20 years before as an eager young hood. It was as if time and the old man had stood still. They stared across the room at one another before moving forward and clasping hands.

"I'll miss you, Rick." The old man's eyes were moist. "You've been like a son to me."

Malloy's shoulders relaxed. "Then my resignation has been accepted?"

"It's not like the old days." The old man shrugged. "When a loyal man wants to retire from active duty now, we don't stop him."

"But it wasn't necessary to invite me all the way out here to tell me so." Malloy met the old man's gaze. "There's something else."

"One last favor, Rick—one last hit." The old man's voice took on a note of urgency. "We've found Jesse Delano's girl."

Delano had headed up the mob's narcotics operations on the eastern coast until an anonymous phone call two years before to the F.B.I. had resulted in a raid which caught him red-handed with $2,000,000 worth of heroin. The organization failed to uncover the leak in its top ranks until the girl suddenly disappeared after Delano's trial, and it was learned she'd been planted by a rival mob conducting a personal vendetta against the old man and his chiefs. A contract was put out on her, but apparently she had vanished from the face of the earth—until now.

"How did you nail her?"

"She used to be a registered nurse. We kept checking out all the hospitals and doctors."

You dumb broad, Malloy thought; the first rule of survival is to cut all old ties. Aloud he said, "All right, I'll take the contract."

The old man nodded a silent thanks, walked over to a rolltop desk, and took out a large manila envelope. "Here's all the information you'll need. There's one thing, Rick." The old man's eyes darkened. "Hit her as fast as you can. The Feds

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haven't stopped looking for her either. If they get to her first, it could be the end of the ball game for a lot of us."

For the next few days Malloy observed the girl's movements, noting that she arrived punctually at the doctor's office in the morning at 10:00 A.M., took a half-hour lunch break at noontime, returned to the office, and left for the day around 6:00 P.M. The name she used was Anne Winslow and she had rooms over the nearby drug store. A tour of the town's bars and the single movie house confirmed what Malloy already suspected—that she kept to herself after working hours.

He also made a check on the local police. The sheriff was an aging ex-state trooper named Bill McGregor who was assisted by Tom Grayson, an arrogant young deputy with longish hair whom Malloy took an instant dislike to. Finally Malloy drove away from the isolated town and into the desert. He got out of the car with pick and shovel and walked between the balls of cactus, stopped before a cluster of heat-baked rocks, and prodded the surrounding earth. Returning to the car, he stared out into the vast emptiness, thinking how easy it would be for a person to lose his way.

It was the third morning after Malloy started working at the service station that the "accident" occurred. The jack he was turning to prop up an auto slipped out of his hands and he suffered a deep gash on the calf of his left leg. Jim Turner hurried over to assist him up.

"Doc Hanley will fix you up. Hang on while I get the Jeep."

She wore a crisp white uniform over her tall slim figure, assisting adeptly as Dr. Hanley, a man in his early sixties who spoke in short hurried sentences, gave Malloy an antibiotic shot and started treating the injury. Malloy glanced over at her during the procedure and once she looked up and met his gaze, then quickly lowered her eyes.

Later the girl led Malloy into the small reception room to ask him some questions, efficiently writing down his answers on a file card. When he got up to leave and she lingered beside the door he knew she'd been hooked by the bait he'd fed her.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Malloy—about your wife leaving you and taking your son." Her eyes were dark with sympathy.

"You can't blame a woman for wanting security for herself and her child." He looked past her. "I've been running away

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from myself for twenty-five years now."

The late morning heat mingled with the air-conditioned coolness of the reception room. "You're wondering why I've come to Reamore, aren't you?" he asked, and he saw her body stiffen. "You know nobody comes to this hot hole-in-the-ground if they have a choice. Tell me, Miss Winslow, what are you running away from?"

The girl stood rigid, her face flushed with color as if he had just struck her. Then she retreated inside, closing the door quickly behind her.

He was seated at the counter in the coffee shop when she walked in later that afternoon. She hesitated when she spied him, then recovered herself and moved toward a booth in the farthest corner. Malloy waited until the proprietor, a husky ex-cowpoke called Jake, had served her, before picking up his beer and walking over to her table.

"I must apologize for my behavior this morning." He flashed a friendly grin. "My scars were showing."

"You hit on a sensitive nerve, that's all. We all bear scars in one form or another."

"Care to tell me about it?" He sat down opposite her.

"It's a long story. And this is neither the time nor the place."

"Okay, then, are you free tonight?"

She looked amused. "Do you usually come on like a bulldozer when you meet a girl?"

"Not always." He returned her smile. "What time shall I pick you up?"

She told him and he got up and left, aware as he paid Jake at the cash register and walked outside that her eyes would be following him.

Her apartment was a three-roomer with contemporary-styled furniture, accessible by a flight of stairs to the right of the drug-store entrance. Malloy quickly scanned it while she gathered her belongings, noting there were no photographs or mementoes to tie the girl in with anyone else. It was the kind of home he was familiar with—the impersonal domain of one who always had to be ready to move on to another town, another country if necessary. He had stayed in similar places himself during the passing years.

They drove out to a roadside bar just south of the town and elbowed their way past the circle of denim-trousered cowboys standing at the bar, to the accompaniment of a rock tune being played on the jukebox. He guided the girl to a table at

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the rear and ordered drinks.

She sat silently sipping a martini, her eyes quickly darting to the entrance whenever a newcomer appeared.

"You were supposed to tell me your long story. Remember?"

"Would you be annoyed if I told you this still isn't the right time?"

"It's your story, baby." He stared down at her in the dimly lit room, studying the expression on her face. It was almost vulnerable, certainly sad. "But I can guess this much. Whatever it is, you're knee-deep in trouble. The unsolvable kind."

She gazed at him with eyes darkened by fear. "You have a vivid imagination, Mr. Malloy. But even if that were true—" She broke off suddenly. "Please, let's leave."

The girl stared straight ahead as they jostled their way out. Malloy waited until they'd reached the exit before casually glancing back. His eyes met those of the deputy, Grayson, who stood lounging against the wall at the rear of the bar.

She remained silent and uptight during the long drive down the highway and back into town.

"Anne—" He put out a restraining hand as she reached for the car door. "I won't pry any more. But if you do decide to confide in me I'm ready to listen. And to help, if I can."

She looked up at him as if she were memorizing the lines on his face, then she quickly got out of the car.

The next morning after a restless sleep during which he dreamed he was driving back to the farm and lost his way, Malloy called Hanson.

"Tom Grayson, the local deputy—what have you got on him?" he demanded.

"Has he been eyeing you? He's clean, like we told you."

"Yeah, pure as a skunk. It's not me he's eyeing, it's the girl. She's scared of him for some reason—and I want to know why."

Malloy and the girl had dinner that evening at a posh steak house in town. She seemed more relaxed.

"You're not really the penniless drifter you claim to be," she teased, "if you can afford these prices."

"All right, I confess. I've recently acquired a great deal of money. An inheritance, in fact." He adopted her light tone. "You're looking at the proud owner of eighteen acres of Pennsylvania cornfields."

"That explains the far-away look in your eyes. The farm's for real, isn't it?"

Malloy nodded. "You might say I've come full circle. I was

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born there, hated it as a boy and ran away when I was fifteen. Many things have happened since—service in the Navy, marriage, divorce, trouble with the law. Now that it's mine it's become the most important thing in the world to me. I want to go back to where it all started. Ironic, isn't it?"

"Maybe, but I envy you. You can go home again." Her eyes were suddenly downcast. "How much longer are you planning to stay in Reamore?"

"A week, maybe two at the most." He lit a cigarette, watching her through the haze of smoke.

"I'll be sorry to see you go."

"Then why stay here? What is it about this damned desert town that makes it so attractive to you?"

"You're coming on strong again, Rick." A pleading look came into her eyes. "Please, let me think this over."

They left the restaurant later arm in arm. When her fingers suddenly entwined tighter around his, he looked up. Parked across the street was the police station wagon with Grayson seated behind the wheel watching them.

Malloy spent another uneasy night, phoning Hanson around 5:30 in the morning.

"What's the matter, couldn't you wait for the birds to get up?" Hanson growled. "We've checked out the fuzz again—there's not a scratch on him."

"Yeah, so you say. Last night he was eyeing the girl again."

"That's her problem." Hanson yawned loudly. "There's nothing to get uptight about. Say, you're not softening up towards this broad, are you?"

Malloy hung up the receiver without answering.

He saw the girl on the following three evenings and on the third night they made love. Afterward, when he left in the early morning hours, she clung to him like a frightened child afraid of the dark and he pushed her roughly away from him. Back in his room he lay back against the pillows of the bed, downing bourbon steadily until drowsiness overcame him and he fell into a heavy slumber which blotted out all images.

The next afternoon he went to see Dr. Hanley again. He felt her touch his elbow as she was ushering him out.

"We'll have dinner at my place tonight, Rick." She looked anxiously up at him. "That long story you wanted to hear—I'm ready to tell it now."

She did tell him later that evening as they sat in the living room of her apartment, only it was a modified version of the facts as Malloy knew

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them. It seemed that at one time, between nursing jobs, she had worked in New York as a confidential secretary to a man who turned out to be an underworld figure and who was later arrested and sent to prison. During her employment she had seen some papers she wasn't supposed to see and had fled the city, fearing for her life.

"Why are you so sure they're looking for you?"

"I lived for a while in Chicago, thinking it would be easy to get lost in another big city. But I was wrong. One evening as I entered my apartment a man came towards me from the hallway and I panicked, running down the stairs." She paused, sighing. "I left that same night by bus, winding up here eventually. That was a year and a half ago."

"You could have gone to the police."

"I didn't want to become another police file number, and the last thing I wanted was publicity." In the softly lit room she looked more helpless than ever. "I just wanted to forget the whole thing—if only they'd let me."

"It could be they've given you up for lost by now," Malloy persisted.

"I only wish I could believe that." Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "I don't want you to leave me, Rick."

"I've stopped running, Anne. So why can't you? Besides, there's an alternative." Malloy grasped her by the shoulders. "You can get swallowed up by the Pennsylvania countryside with me."

He left her shortly afterward, a frail figure on the sofa, sobbing.

On his way to the coffee shop at noon the next day he saw Grayson approach the girl at the entrance. She brushed him angrily aside and when Malloy entered she was already seated, her face pale and without expression.

"Tell me why the fuzz is bugging you, Anne," he said, "so I'll have a legitimate reason for punching him in the jaw."

"It's not your problem, Rick." She stared at the marble-topped table.

"Really? After last night I thought there'd be no more secrets between us."

"He has this thing about me." She relaxed then, her anger spent. "I've tried to discourage him, but he just doesn't get the message."

"Has he ever made a pass at you?"

She shook her head. "He just follows me around, staring at me, sometimes making ambiguous remarks—like now."

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"I suggest you have a talk with the sheriff about his erring boy, angel. Or I will."

She promised to speak to McGregor that same afternoon, and for the next few days Grayson was nowhere in sight whenever Malloy and the girl were together.

During this time he dreamed that he reached down to pick up the stalks of corn on the farm and found his arms covered with blood. He woke up in a sweat, rubbing his arms frantically.

It was with relief that he heard from Turner that the regular mechanic was returning to work the following Monday. He called up Anne and told her to meet him at Jake's coffee shop at noon. When he went outside he saw the police station wagon pulled up beside one of the gas pumps. Grayson was leaning against the rear door, his thin lips forming an unpleasant grin as Malloy walked by.

Anne was waiting for him in the corner booth, apprehension clouding her face.

"Well, it's happened. I'm out of a job. But more important, I've received title to the farm," he told her. "I'm leaving Sunday afternoon. Are you coming with me?"

She stared back at him, trembling.

"Yes," she said finally in a shy voice. "Yes, I'm coming with you."

He reached for her hand. "You won't let me down, will you, Anne?"

Her only answer was the pressure of her hand.

On Sunday morning he took the car to the service station to have it gassed and oiled.

"You don't let moss grow under your shoes, do you?" Turner grinned.

"Not if I can help it. But I do remember faces." Malloy kept his tone casual. "Like that long-haired deputy of yours. I'd swear I've met him somewhere before."

"Could be. Tom Grayson's only been in Reamore about eighteen months."

Back at the boardinghouse Malloy carefully rubbed all traces of his fingerprints from the furniture in the room. After bringing his suitcase and duffel bag out to the car, he drove around to the girl's apartment. Her luggage was in the hallway and he quickly locked it in the trunk compartment.

He drove to the edge of town, parked in a deserted back street leading to Highway 9, waited a half hour before she appeared. She was breathing heavily as she got into the car, as if she'd been running instead of riding on a bus.

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"Have some of this." He took a flask from the glove compartment.

He glanced over at her before starting the engine and a queasy feeling attacked him in the pit of his stomach. What the devil was the matter with him? He couldn't cop out now. Think about the farm, man. Hell, all he wanted was to get away from this infernal heat and from this girl who stirred uncomfortable longings inside of him. But he had to keep a cool head. So for the first few miles he kept his eyes on the road, calculating how long it would take to reach the spot he had selected for the hit.

When she finally spoke her voice was barely audible. "For almost two years I've avoided any real contact with people because of this fear I've lived with. Then you come along and ask me to go away with you—and here I am."

"How does it feel—to be out in the open?"

"Not so frightening—with you here." Her fingertips stroked his arm and again the nervous feeling swelled inside him.

"Don't," he said sharply.

She settled back against the seat, respecting his mood. After what seemed an eternity to Malloy the sun sank in the distance and a charcoal darkness enveloped the highway. He glanced in the rear-view mirror to make sure there were no cars behind them.

He spotted the side road about a half a mile farther down and stepped on the accelerator, the car jerking over the rock-laden, cactus-filled dirt, throwing the girl roughly against the door. Malloy brought the car to a screeching halt and pulled the girl to an upright position, holding the .38 close against her ribs.

"Sorry, baby," he said. "This is where we split."

She was shivering again, wide-eyed with fear. "Oh, no—not you. Please, I'll do anything—only *please*."

He looked down at her for a moment, almost with contempt. She was like all the rest, after all. "Get out of the car—real slow. We're going for a little walk."

The girl moved out in clumsy motions like a doll manipulated by strings. He forced her to walk in front of him, listening for any sounds that might disturb the tranquillity he now felt. She was murmuring incoherent words, but he made no effort to understand them. His mind and eyes were focused ahead to where a cluster of rocks loomed like shadowy ghosts. Once or twice she collapsed, and he

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pulled her to her feet.

"This is where we stop." She turned halfway around, but he halted her. "No, stay just the way you are."

"What's the matter, Rick?" she said. "Don't you like to look at your victims when you hit them?"

"I'm not enjoying this either, baby. I could have gone ape for you if things were different."

"Then give me a chance, Rick! Say I ran away, that you couldn't find me—"

"Save your breath, angel. I don't make the rules in this game, I only enforce them. And you committed one of the cardinal sins." He stepped back, putting more distance between them.

He backed into the cold barrel of a revolver and froze.

"Drop it, Malloy. Nice and easy."

Malloy's fingers slowly released their grip on the .38. The thumping sound the gun made as it hit the ground matched the pounding of his heart. "How did you figure it out, fuzz?"

"I pegged you for one of the old man's guns the day you drove into town, Malloy." Grayson's sneer sent shivers down Malloy's spine. "And I'm not the fuzz. It was a cover to watch out for Little Orphan Annie here. You see, my organization looks out for its own, too."

"You certainly took your time getting here," the girl snapped at Grayson.

"You're still breathing, aren't you? Get his gun."

This time the chill spread throughout Malloy's body, numbing him. He watched in a daze as the girl moved in closer and picked up his gun. Her eyes were dry and hard as they met his.

"I should have realized. You both arrived in Reamore at about the same time," Malloy said to no one in particular.

"Right on, Malloy. And we'll be leaving together, too—before another one of the old man's boys shows up. But you don't have to worry about it any longer." Grayson's lanky figure moved directly in front of Malloy. "Thanks for setting up everything so neatly for us. I couldn't have done a better job myself."

A muted sound filled the night air as Malloy fell to his knees, a bright kaleidoscope of the farm appearing in his mind's eye before he collapsed face down and tasted the cool dry sand in his mouth. Then everything was darkness.

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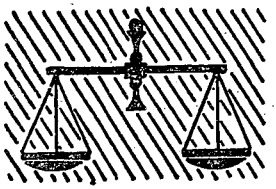

THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Once more, of necessity, January's introductory assessment will contain a warning that most items here considered must belong to the old year rather than the new. Never mind; it's a very fair complement of blood and thunder. I can provide one espionage exploit of such superior quality as to deserve pride of place; two detective novels contrasted in their approach; and one collection of classic tales, time *circa* Edwardian, here at last rescued from oblivion. With such strong fare to claim attention until we are properly launched for '73, not a soul among us need complain.

Swift, deadly move or counter-move throughout William P. McGivern's *Caprifoil* (Dodd, Mead, $6.95) finds American Agent August Spencer and Britain's likable "Bunny" Ackerley locked in combat against unseen forces, their lives always in hazard with every hand against them.

André Leroi, their former associate and France's own ace agent, has disappeared with a warning of disaster which may soon explode. Against earth's security Arab fanatics called the Saracen Vector have devised a plot so wild yet so practical as almost to stagger imagination.

Can Spencer thwart the design? Can anybody thwart it? For in action there's no pause or break. Not only do we race with Spencer from Paris to Frankfurt and back again, while death ticks like a bomb at his ear. Adroit shifts of narrative carry us from the White House in Washington to the terrorists' stronghold outside Algiers, where Arab Colonel Gamal awaits triumph with General Mercier, the French traitor who backs him.

But nemesis has been challenged. As the American aircraft carrier approaches Algiers, as the sky thunders to jets or darkens with descending parachutes, one last private battle sprays bullets through the Arabs' fort to write *finis*. August Spencer survives, taking wing to join his latest mistress in Mexico. And, since Mr. McGivern is a hypnotic story-teller, we have believed every word along the way.

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A Trout in the Milk, by Michael Underwood (Walker, $5.95), has as background the City of London, that narrow area of London Town itself, and in particular the ancient legal haunt of the Temple.

Eminent Barrister James Geddy has begun the Old Bailey defense of Frank Manion, notorious wrong 'un as yet unconvicted, when a harmless young law student is messily stabbed to death for no apparent reason whatever. Though crime-hardened wrong 'un and innocent student are total strangers, their cases seem strangely related as circumstantial evidence gathers round both.

"Some circumstantial evidence is very strong," said Thoreau, "as when you find a trout in the milk." Hence our title; hence the problem attacked by Detective Chief Superintendent Roffey, City Police. The author, Department of Public Prosecutions, portrays every aspect of a barrister's life: upstairs, downstairs, in and out of chambers. If at times the legal gentry are more compelling than the story, Mr. Underwood points his surprise finish with a clue so obvious that it may slip past unnoticed. Take care!

Despite its mock-whimsical title, which may be disregarded, in Peter Lovesey's *Abracadaver* (Dodd, Mead, $4.95), an authority Victorian background again vividly recreates London ninety years ago, with dirty work amid the boozy, brawling uproar of the music hall. What has seemed no more than a plague of brutal jokes freezes suddenly into deliberate murder, providing headaches for doughty Sergeant Cribb of the old, original Scotland Yard.

It's a tangled business, both evil and intricate. Every police move seems frustrated by almost superhuman cunning until Cribb's trap nails the murderer and ends a hunt as spectacular as it has been fairly marked with clues. Very much Grade A.

Unless you are overprejudiced against the briefer form, don't miss *Best Max Carrados Detective Stories*, by Ernest Bramah, selected and introduced by E. F. Bleiler (Dover, $3.00). Winnowed from three all-but-forgotten volumes into durable paperback, here are nine tales of Max Carrados, blind but all-seeing contemporary of Sherlock Holmes.

Though there have been other blind detectives—Damon Gaunt, Thornley Colton, today's Duncan Maclain—you will find Carrados impressive as he solves neat, fascinating mysteries which never outrage belief. We may flatter ourselves that we have grown too sophisticated, but we are not yet too sophisticated for the late Ernest Bramah.

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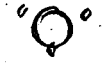
"So the magpie might get free . . ."

THE LAST FABLE

by EDWARD WELLEN

PRIEST: What madness possessed him to defile Delphi, to steal a silver cup from the temple? Worse, to do it so stupidly as to let himself get caught? I'd better join in the stoning or the others will think I show too little zeal. But what a waste that such a man as Aesop should die for nothing.

DYING MAN: Has Iadmon got free, with no one suspecting him? Ahh. Now let me take my mind off the pain. "Once, for sport, the gods made the nightingale the magpie's slave. But the magpie, though foolish, had a good nature and in time set the nightingale free. One day the wandering nightingale came upon his old master again, in time to see the magpie steal a bright stone from the nesting place of a flock of crows. The crows quickly missed the bright stone and looked for the thief. The nightingale snatched the stone from the magpie and let the crows catch him with it so the magpie might get free." Ahh, that is my last—



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"Skeleton banished from the feast . . ."

BALLADE OF THE JAILBIRD

by EDWARD WELLEN

ROGUE: I'll smash his feather-brained think-pot in. Asked him if he had anything to whack up and he said only his hard luck. Teach him to hold out on me. I'll have all, not just half a lousy scrap of raw flesh. Does he think I didn't peg him tearing off part of that fat half-plucked goose and stashing it under his shirt while them hick fuzz nailed us? I'll tell the screws he climbed up to look out the grating and fell. Not that they'll give a damn. Just one more nobody vanishing from history.

VAGABOND: My lovely side-kick sits in his corner with hooded glims, inspiring me to stir myself. No, really, I do feel the need to set something down. For ink, some soot from around the hook where the turnkey hangs his lamp, and some of my own spit, tasting of gall; for parchment, a piece of my shirt; for pen, the hidden goose quill, sharpened hot on the cold stone of this clink. For light, strained moon. For poem, life with a wolf in its belly. I plume myself this will be my best one yet. How will it go? "I, François Villon, skeleton banished from the feast . . ."

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"When she introduced me to Arthur, I had the unshakable feeling there was something very familiar about him."

THE DISCUSSION IS OVER

by JEFF SWEET

"It's not safe," she pronounced.

"But, Mom," I argued, "they say it's as safe as driving a car."

"In a car, if something goes wrong, at least you have a chance. In a plane you lose a screw and it's bye-bye Charlie."

"But statistics prove—"

"Don't give me statistics," she interrupted, her hand raised, her head turned away. "They can make statistics say anything they want. Statistics, hunh! Go tell my cousin Lou your statistics."

"You know I can't tell Cousin Lou," I said. "Cousin Lou's dead."

"And how did he die?" countered Mom. "In a plane crash!"

"Cousin Lou was shot down in the War," I said. "It's not the same thing."

"He wouldn't have been shot down if he hadn't gone up," Mom answered. "The discussion is over."

Which is how every discussion ended—Mom declared it over and herself the winner. Mom was right. Mom was always right. Even when she was wrong she was right. *Especially* when she was wrong. I don't know why I argued with her. I guess I never really learned.

Dad never argued with her. He'd learned a long time ago. There was a permanent look of resignation in his tired eyes. I was angry for him. I might have been angry at him for having given up, for not fighting back, except that I loved him too much. So I was angry for him.

It was partially for him that I jousted with Mom. I had dreams of one day winning a grand victory. I would run rings around her, turning her own twisted logic against her, leaving her sputtering in wordless exasperation over a cup of cold coffee in the kitchen. That was the dream. It never happened.

Anyway, because of Lou's run-in with the Luftwaffe, she wouldn't go anywhere near an

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airport, and she wouldn't let Dad or me go near one either.

Of course, things changed.

I flew on a 747. The pictures I'd seen on television and in the magazines hadn't prepared me for how huge it was. I couldn't believe it would get off the ground. As we roared down the runway I remember thinking that maybe instead of flying it would just continue to zoom at this incredible speed on the ground, cross-country.

I pictured the pilot braking at a booth on the tollway and tossing a handful of quarters into the basket, then stepping on the gas and hurtling like a meteor past crawling Porsches and Stingrays. But with a quiver of those enormous wings we started climbing. My hands gripped the armrests tightly as I looked down and caught a last glimpse of New York retreating behind the smog.

When we descended it was into the smog of Los Angeles. A new city, a new start. That's how I had it figured.

I checked into a hotel and after freshening up decided to stretch my legs on Hollywood Boulevard. I bought new clothes, lots of them, paying with traveler's checks. As I was having my feet measured for boots I realized that this was the first time I'd gone shopping without Mom.

"That color looks hideous," she'd say. "Don't you think that color looks hideous?"

"I think it looks fine," I'd say. "I like it."

"You have no taste." She'd turn to Dad, whom she always dragged along on the pretext of wanting his opinion. "Bert, doesn't this shirt look absolutely hideous?"

"Hmm?" Dad would be sitting in a corner, half asleep.

"This shirt."

"Yes, yes, very nice," he'd yawn, because he figured that's what she wanted to hear.

"You *like* this?" she'd fire back, deeply outraged.

"Don't you?" he'd ask cautiously, sensing danger in the air.

"You're a fool," she'd snort, tossing the shirt down. Other customers would turn to look in our direction, with amused smiles on their faces. Mom wouldn't notice them. But Dad and I would.

His face would turn red. "I'll wait in the car," he'd say.

I remember once when Mom was looking at umbrellas she opened six or seven, judged them all "junk" in a voice that could be heard throughout the store, and finally, after correcting the salesman's grammar and informing him his tie was the ugliest thing she'd ever seen, she stormed out the door, leaving

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the opened umbrellas in a clutter on the floor.

When she was outside, she realized she'd also left Dad nodding in a chair. She stuck her head back into the store and yelled, "Wake up, you old fool!" Dad jumped, accidentally stepping on an umbrella. A spoke broke and jabbed a hole into his pants, scratching his leg. Of course he had to pay for the umbrella.

Living in a hotel was fine for a couple of days, but I was itching for a place of my own. I picked up a copy of the Sunday *L. A. Times* and, over a fruit plate at Hamburger Hamlet, looked through the furnished rooms section. I made note of the promising addresses and phone numbers, and with a pocketful of dimes and nickels, occupied a booth in the hotel.

"We converted our second floor into an apartment," said Mrs. Koeppner. "Wall-to-wall carpeting, all the modern conveniences, nice comfy mattress on the bed, very handy to the bus, in a nice residential area. Oh, and we've got a small pool in the backyard."

"I'll be right over," I said. It turned out to be just what I wanted.

"Are you a student?" Mrs. Koeppner asked after she'd given me a receipt for the advance rent.

"No," I said. "I'm sort of a writer."

"Stories?" she asked.

"Actually, right now I'm working on a book about a new branch of philosophy I've just developed. It's going to be called *A Rational Approach to Absurdity.*"

"And you're so young," she cooed in condescending awe.

I hate it when people say I'm so young. Hate it, hate it, hate it. Mom used to say it a lot. It was always an excuse for not letting me do what I wanted.

"Mom, I want to get my own apartment. It's a pain commuting two hours a day to and from NYU."

"You're too young," she said. "I wouldn't trust you alone in an apartment. You'd kill yourself in two weeks and then you'd blame me."

"No, I wouldn't."

"You wouldn't blame me?"

"I wouldn't kill myself."

"That's what they all say. Where did you get this idea about moving out?"

"It's my idea."

"I'll bet." Her suspicious eye fell on Dad reading the newspaper. "This is one of your father's foolish ideas, isn't it? Is it one of your ideas, Bert?"

Dad looked up. "Hmm?"

"Why do you always start trouble?" she accused.

"I'm sorry," he said.

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"It was my idea," I said. "And I don't see what's so wrong with it. Lots of guys my age have their own apartments."

"The discussion is over."

"Arthur will take you by the hotel so you can pick up your luggage," said Mrs. Koeppner.

Arthur was Mrs. Koeppner's brother. The two of them shared the ground floor of the house. Mrs. Koeppner's husband had died less than a year ago. When she introduced me to Arthur I had the unshakable feeling there was something very familiar about him.

"I'm very happy about the apartment," I said to Arthur in the car.

"Yes, it's very nice up there. I always liked it." There was the hint of a sigh in the last part.

"Oh, did you live up there?"

"When my sister's husband was still alive. The house was our parents', you know. Anyway, Mr. Koeppner died and my sister Nettie said that with that extra space it would be a shame and a scandal if we didn't rent it. So I moved downstairs. I sleep in the living room. The couch folds out into a bed, you know."

"Wouldn't you rather have your old room back?" I asked.

"Oh, well," he said, "it doesn't matter that much. It was nice up there but I'm fine on the couch. Besides, it means extra money. Nettie always could use a little extra money. Do you play chess?"

I suddenly knew why he seemed familiar. It was his eyes. They looked just like Dad's.

"Dad," I said, "why do you take it from her?"

He smiled sadly, the lines around his eyes multiplying. "You don't understand," he said.

"You're right," I told him. "I don't understand. The way Mom treats you, it just isn't right. Why don't you fight back? Or leave?"

"It's that simple to you?" he asked.

"Yes, it is."

He sighed. "Maybe it would be that simple to me if I were your age."

"I don't see what age has to do with it."

He shook his head. "I'm fifty years old, and I've been married to your mother for more than half my life. Twenty-six years of a certain way of living. I can't just change. I wouldn't know *how* to change."

"But it's a rut, Dad—"

"There are certain redeeming features to a rut, son. You always know where you are, for one thing. That's a kind of security if you look at it the

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right way. There aren't many people who can claim they have security."

The earnest way he said this chilled me. "Dad, have you ever gotten anything you wanted?"

As soon as I said it, I wished I hadn't. I hoped it wouldn't hurt him.

He thought for a moment, then smiled again. "I had a son," he said.

I felt like crying.

Mrs. Koeppner invited me to come downstairs and join her and her brother for dinner that night. Bringing the gravy out, Arthur tripped on the telephone wire and fell to the floor. The gravy became a muddy puddle on the carpet.

"You old fool," said Mrs. Koeppner. "You clumsy old fool." She turned to me. "Have you ever seen such a clumsy fool in your life?"

"I'll clean it up," said Arthur.

"I'll do it," said his sister. "You'll only make a mess of it."

"I know how—" he began.

"Sit down," she ordered. "The discussion is over."

I excused myself from the table.

Dad had a heart attack. He was lifting a box. Suddenly he let out a kind of whimper and crumpled. Mom wasn't in the house. I called an ambulance and it took him to the hospital. He died on the way.

I tried phoning Mom, but there was no answer. I walked home and tried to understand what had happened so quickly.

Mom was in the kitchen when I got back to the apartment. "*There* you are!" she said. "And where is that old fool you call your father?"

"Have you ever seen such a clumsy fool in your life?" said Mrs. Koeppner.

And now things are melting together in my mind. Spinning, going in and out of focus. Words repeat themselves loud and furious. A sharp pain in my stomach. I swing wildly at whirling clouds of red. A force, a tornado, driving me, compelling me, till suddenly I break through and the world is a quiet cool green. Calm. I know what I'm going to do.

I do it.

I strangle Mrs. Koeppner. Just like I did Mom.

And finally the discussion is over.

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a *NEW* detective story by

JAMES POWELL

This is the 16th story by James Powell to appear in EQMM since his debut with "The Friends of Hector Jouvet" in our April 1966 issue. And James Powell remains as unpredictable as ever. We honestly believe that at James Powell's 60th story we still won't be able to guess in advance what the story will be about, still won't have the remotest notion what to expect.

Now, James Powell's "The Pomeranian's Whereabouts"—and talk about your unusual detectives! Try Shepherd Frye, a graduate of the APLA. . .

The simple truth is, no one else—only James Powell—could have written this story. Cra-zy!

THE POMERANIAN'S WHEREABOUTS

by JAMES POWELL

Among other things, Shepherd Frye loved dogs because you never had to climb trees to put their young back in the nest or rescue them from catwalks or bound after them as they leaped from crag to mountain crag. Frye's fear of heights had prompted him, on graduating from the Animal Protective League Academy, to request Dog Division assignment. Now, 20 years later, he stood, stomach a-flutter, at an open window high in the Martello Tower Apartments and felt betrayed.

"Aunt Charlotte always chats with him," said Scotty Curtis who had returned to trimming his blond mustache with the aid of a hand mirror. "I thought it might make him feel at home. But Leonard finds my conversation banal. A 'hello' from me and he's out onto the ledge and off and running."

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Frye composed his ashen face before turning from the window. "Considerably overdue, isn't he?" he asked, pushing his porkpie to the back of his head. From the street Frye had clocked the dog at six-minute circuits of the building.

"He'll be along," said young Scotty Curtis, catapulting a hair from the lapel of his crushed-velvet dinner jacket. "Listen, got to go. Promised to look in on a friend in the hospital. Then it's the eligible-bachelor-on-the-town bit. So what's the deal?"

Frye drew the letter from his raincoat pocket. The envelope bore a city postmark. The crayon message read: "The little Pomeranian that runs around the fifteenth floor of the Martello Tower Apartments is earmarked for foul play."

Scotty Curtis dismissed the words with a laugh. "Who'd want to harm a dumb animal?" he asked.

Frye winced. His voice was severe. "Quote: 'He is trustworthy, loyal, and returns abuse with affection—and man calls the dog dumb. He disdains alcohol, nicotine, and mind-blowing drugs—and man calls the dog dumb.' Unquote. Words spoken by the APL's late, beloved president, Thorogood Endicott, minutes before he was cut down by a poisoned crossbow bolt on the steps of the Capitol in Washington."

The young man set aside the hand mirror. "Come again."

"Mr. Curtis, suppose I told you that uniformed conspirators prowl our streets in broad daylight using junk mail as an excuse to kick, mace, and terrorize man's best friend, the dog," said Frye. "Yes, Endicott died because he had been instrumental in getting Congress to reduce mail deliveries to one a day. Because of that, The Mail Fist, the supreme council of the International Brotherhood, marked him for death. And neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays those assassins from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

Frye knew he was being deliberately longwinded—anything to postpone a course of action the very thought of which sent his stomach churning.

Scotty Curtis looked half worried. "And you think this Mail Fist bunch is out to harm Leonard?"

"A distinct possibility," said Frye. "You see, The Mail Fist is made up of the past masters of the brotherhood under the leadership of the Past-Master-General, a Frenchman named

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Reynard de St. Médor." Frye held the letter to the light. "French watermark."

"But why the advance warning?"

"Bravado, perhaps," suggested Frye. "A year ago Interpet, the enforcement arm of the World Congress of Animal Protective Leagues, staged a dawn raid on The Mail Fist headquarters, a villa in the Pyrenees just outside of Pau. There was gunplay. Past masters dropped like flies. Invaluable records and the brotherhood treasury fell into our hands. But St. Médor escaped through the morning mist. For months now he's been in hiding, rebuilding his shattered organization. Maybe he's ready now. Maybe this letter is his challenge."

Scotty Curtis frowned at the window. "Mr. Frye," he said uneasily, "when the doctors packed Aunt Charlotte off to a Swiss clinic, she left me little Leonard, the apple of her eye. Now if anything should happen to Leonard while he's in my care, rest assured I will get cut out of the will. And I'm her sole heir. A cool nine million."

Frye gave his earlobe a thoughtful tug. "That's another possibility. If that happened, who'd get the money?"

"Her brother, my Uncle Rex," said the young man. "He has this weight problem. To put it bluntly, he's obese. Aunt Charlotte pays him an allowance to stay out of the country. Last I heard he was a beachcomber on Tippi Tippi, an island in the South Pacific. But I remember him as a nice old guy who wouldn't hurt a fly."

Frye gave a bitter laugh. "Quote: 'Man alone among all the animals can mask black intent with honeyed words and golden smiles.' Unquote."

"Thorogood Endicott, right?" said Scotty Curtis, crossing to the window. He stuck his head outside and shouted, "Leonard, where the hell are you, Leonard?" Then he turned back into the room. "Okay, Mr. Frye. Money makes the mare go. So name the play and I'll back you all the way."

Frye outlined his plan: they would circle the building on the ledge, one going one way, one the other, until they found Leonard or clues to his whereabouts. Frye's secret prayer was that Curtis would reject this as suicidal. But without batting an eye the young man leaped out onto the ledge and walked off at a determined pace.

Frye tried to follow him out but each time he threw a leg over the window sill his knee seemed to come unjointed. He groaned, knowing that if the situation were reversed Rin Tin

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Tin and gentle Lassie would be out the window in a shot, that King, Dog of the North, would have looked without trembling into the abyss. At last, by squeezing his eyes shut and feeling his way, Frye managed to pull himself across the sill and down onto the ledge.

"Don't look down," said a very wise inner voice. But in that same instant the wind plucked at his hat. Frye made a grab for it and then froze, bug-eyed, and watched as the hat spiraled downward making those curious ellipses peculiar to a falling porkpie. Frye hugged the ledge, face inward, and whimpered gently. Several minutes passed before he could force himself ahead on his knees and elbows.

Frye opened his eyes a crack when his brow hit the first sill of the next apartment. It was a bedroom window. So was the next. Both were dark and empty. But the two after that opened into a living room filled with cats. From pillows and rug, from overstuffed arms of chairs and mantel, they watched him pass through eyes of yellow, lime, and Siamese blue. A peaceable kingdom. Not one into which a dog had recently intruded.

Farther on in the kitchen a little old lady was filling saucers with milk from a carton. His knock jogged her. She looked up angrily from the spilled milk. Frye smiled through the glass. He lolled out his tongue and panted. Then he made his face into a question mark. Her hand reached out. The Venetian blinds clattered down like a skeleton.

Well, Frye could understand why cat lovers felt alone and under siege. When a cat screams in the early hours of the morning, who goes out to investigate? Or wonders why the milkman's truck has stopped there in the darkness of the alley? Or cares that come the dawn another of our cats is missing, a victim perhaps of the notorious Pussy Posse?

Frye crawled on. At least he'd made one discovery—city grit covered the window sills. If Leonard went inside freely, he'd leave pawprints, and if anyone leaned out to grab him the grit would be disturbed. This reasoning allowed him to eliminate the next apartment.

But a living-room sill of the apartment after that had been swept clean and spread with bird seed. Frye proceeded cautiously. The APL was increasingly suspicious of bird feeders. Every day, it seemed, more and more little gray men with shopping bags were sitting in the parks feeding fewer and fewer pigeons.

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Frye poked his head inside the open window. "Anybody home?" He got his knees up on the sill and stuck his head in farther. He looked to the left. No one. He looked to the right and was nose to nose with a seated woman whose brassy sausage curls and enormous, made-up eyes gave her a doll-like cuteness that belied the threat of the silver martini stirrer she was wagging.

"The kneesies, the kneesies," she ordered. Frye blinked but didn't move. She whacked the stirrer hard across his kneecaps. Frye jerked back. His knees hit the ledge and then slipped off into space. In his mind's eye he saw himself, his raincoat flapping about him, falling like some broken canvas bird. But at the last second his two white-knuckled hands caught the sill and he hung there.

"New girl in town and all the boys try to get into her boudoir," he heard the woman say.

In a voice strained by his efforts to get his knees back up onto the ledge, Frye identified himself and explained why he was there. "Shepherd?" she said. "Bet they call you Shep. Miss Plum here. But you can call me Queenie." She took a healthy pull from her martini and watched Frye fight for his life. "Animals?" she continued. "I love them all. Oh, to be a bird flying high-high-high, eh, Shep? Imagine looking down on all the teeny-tiny houses, cars, and people." ("Don't look down," warned Frye's inner voice as he hooked an elbow over the sill.) Queenie put a martini into his hand. "Here's to animals everywhere. Down the hatch."

The toast wasn't one an APL man could refuse. Frye took a quick sip and moved to put the glass down. Queenie shook her head and tapped a carefully chosen spot on his rib cage with the stirrer. If jabbed there Frye knew he would giggle out loud, release his grip, and fall chuckling to the street below.

"I said, 'Down the hatch,' Shep," Queenie reminded him. Frye finished the drink in one quick swallow, closing his eyes to hold back the tears as the gin burned its way down, down, down. "As for Leonard," she continued, "he trotted by a couple of minutes ago. You know, maybe that dog takes to the ledge because he doesn't take to the company young Curtis keeps. Can't say I do either."

"Could you be more specific?" croaked Frye, hoarse from the gin.

"Nothing I can put a finger on," she admitted, adding, "Well, welcome to what I call

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my happy hour, that quiet time when I sit here over a drinkie or two and wish my fine feathered friends *bon appetit*, as they say in France."

Frye's eyes became watery slits. The Mail Fist had a woman's auxiliary called The Velvet Glove. "Spend a lot of time in France, do you, Miss Plum?" he asked.

She shook her head. "*Helas*, in all my traveling for my job—I secretary-translate for King-Sullivan Mines—I haven't made France yet."

As he pondered that one Frye noticed something mixed in with the bird seed on the sill. He held a piece up to his eye. "I suppose you can explain this dog biscuit crumb," he said.

Queenie gave a perfect little laugh and pulled bird seed from one housecoat pocket and dog biscuits from the other. "Leonard always barks at the birds and scares them off," she said. "By getting them all to break bread together I hoped to foster better relations."

Frye smiled condescendingly. "In the Eighth Century the usurping Empress Wu taught parrots and cats to eat together out of the same dish and thought she'd brought about the Millennium," he said, knowing that whenever he started on the usurping Empress Wu he was feeling his alcohol. "Okay, I'll buy your story," he added. "But just to keep the record straight I'd like to look around inside."

The stirrer flashed straight to the mark. Frye giggled abruptly, jumped in the air, and a moment later was hanging in space again. "I'm hardly the kind of girl who lets a man into her apartment on the first date," said Queenie, looking down at him. "But maybe I can rustle you up another drink." When she went for ice, Frye got back up onto the ledge and crawled away as fast as he could.

The bolted martini was sitting pretty well. Frye found himself humming as he padded along to the next apartment. A window box filled with pawprints sat on the first living-room sill. Frye made a porthole of his hands and peered inside. The man on the sofa was staring down into a large leather suitcase. Perhaps the man's outsized features—the massive jaw, jutting brow, and crudely hewn nose and ears—helped exaggerate the look on his face. Whatever the reason, it was the biggest gloat Frye had ever seen.

Frye rapped on the glass. The man's head snapped up. He slammed the lid of the suitcase and crossed quickly to the window. Frye noted that he

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moved without that listing gait (the result of the weight of the mailbag) which, even out of uniform, marks the brotherhood. Also, the man's clothes were several sizes too big: the trousers puckered at the waist, the shirt gaped under the chin.

The window was thrown open. Deep scowl. Deep voice. "Dane Hartman, Imported Fruits," said the man.

Frye explained why he was there. "Under the circumstances I'm sure you'll have no objection to my searching your apartment."

Hartman folded his arms across his chest. "Not a chance," he said. "A man's home is his castle. Besides, who'd want to harm a dumb animal?"

"Quote," said Frye wearily, " 'He doesn't put on a uniform and march off to war or invent weapons of destruction to kill his own kind—and so man calls the dog dumb.' " Frye looked over his shoulder to see where Hartman's gaze had wandered. Queenie was edging her way along the ledge toward them, carrying stemmed glasses and a martini pitcher.

She arrived. Taking the stirrer from between her teeth she said, "Shep, Curtis pals around with this creepy guy whose face always rang a bell. Well, I just remembered from where. He's wanted. His picture's on the post-office wall."

"Spend a lot of time in the post office, do you, Miss Plum?" asked Frye.

"The guy you mean is Pennsylvania Dutch Stolfuz," said Hartman. "Recognized him from the newspapers when I was here two weeks ago to look over this place. The Joneses, the people I'm subletting from, said he was a friend of Curtis." Frye's heart pounded. Pennsylvania Dutch, the Underworld's dog-racing czar, was high on the APL's Wanted list.

Queenie rattled the pitcher. "Drinkie-poo time," she announced. Inside the apartment a phone rang. As Hartman hurried off, Queenie whispered, "Shep, I've seen that guy somewhere before, too."

Frye frowned thoughtfully and refused the drink she offered. The stirrer flashed. Frye blurted a giggle of terror, gave a short jump, and teetered backward. But a big fist shot out and grabbed him by the lapels. Hartman held Frye there in space and eyed him up and down coldly and unappreciatively. Then he jammed the phone into Frye's stomach and dropped him on the window box. "It's for you," he said.

Frye hugged the box, gasping for breath. But when Queenie handed him the mar-

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tini with a firm "Down the hatch, Shep," down the hatch it went. Frye made a horrible face and tossed the glass over his shoulder. "Hello," he snarled into the receiver.

"Scotty Curtis here, Mr. Frye." Feminine laughter tinkled behind the voice. "Figured you'd be as far as the Joneses' window. Listen, the airline stewardesses in 15F are throwing a little shindig for some stewardess friends and they sort of dragged me in for a drink. Thought I'd let you know. But I'm still keeping that eye out for Leonard." Before Frye could speak, feminine voices crowded in. "Excuse me a moment, Mr. Frye," said Curtis. Frye drummed his fingers impatiently.

"Some think martinis should be sipped," Queenie was saying as she scattered bird seed on the ledge. "I say knock 'em back."

"Give me my own invention, the hartman, anytime," said Hartman. "A martini with a cube of fresh pineapple instead of the olive. I'm big in pineapples and scour the Pacific for the very best. The natives call me Manua Manua." Queenie's sudden laughter almost made her choke on her drink. "That means 'The Demanding One,' " explained Hartman. "They know Hartman only takes the finest fruit picked at the peak of perfection."

"Guess you get to Tippi Tippi a lot," said Frye offhandedly. But Curtis was back on the line before the question could be answered.

"The girls want me to invite you over," said Scotty Curtis, adding a whispered, "I told them you were an eligible bachelor, too."

"Curtis, if you don't care about Leonard, think of your aunt's will," said Frye, his tongue stumbling a bit over the words. "Money makes the mare go, remember?"

"Life's too short for greed," said Curtis. "Besides, most people only have one rich relative. I've got loads. All in their twilight years, all teetering on the brink—if you follow me."

"All right, you quitter," said Frye thickly, "I'm coming after you with a few questions about the company you keep. Get the answers ready!" All this time Frye had been inching out of range of the martini stirrer. Now he slammed down the receiver, dialed APL headquarters, and ordered search warrants for every apartment on the floor. Then he glared at Queenie and Hartman and announced, "I'm moving up the line. But I'll be back."

Frye crawled away, head

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buzzing slightly but held high. He would find Leonard or bring his kidnapers to justice. This was his firm resolve as he turned the corner of the building. The name MARTELLO TOWER in metal letters ten feet tall blocked the ledge ahead. Frye smiled. Mere words couldn't stop him. The rods connecting the letters to the wall made handy rungs. He climbed the upright of the M, slid down into the trough, climbed back out, and dropped down to the ledge on the other side.

As he moved onward, shinnying, climbing, sliding down from one letter to the next, he was thinking how dogs in their wisdom didn't need cumbersome alphabets. They understood themselves and Nature's scheme. Man must be their only bafflement. Frye laughed grimly. How, after all, can you understand a creature who, though terrified of heights, would crawl out on a ledge 15 floors above the street, bolt two martinis, and end up perched on the second L in MARTELLO?

Frye's laughter then turned thoughtful. In the street below the late rush-hour traffic honked. Frye's laughter died. His eyes snapped shut. He froze where he was, determined never to move again. Yes, he would stay there forever, growing wiser and wiser like a stylite or a guru. The APL people would send animal problems up to him in a basket and he, having mastered the art of reading and writing without opening his eyes, would send solutions back.

Someone was banging on the L with a martini stirrer. "Move it, Shep," came Queenie's voice. "There's a clearing up ahead. Hartman's brought the drinks. We can have a picnic." Frye had learned obedience. With trembling lips he moved it. When he reached the space between MARTELLO and TOWER, he cowered against the wall, legs tucked under him, arm hooked in the O, a broken man.

Hartman sat down in the shade of the T. "She said we should come because misery likes company," he explained.

Queenie sat down between them and scattered seeds for the birds. Then she did the honors on the drinks. Having thrown his glass away, Frye ended up with the pitcher. He took a long watery drink and scowled out across the rooftops meditating on "duty." He imagined himself crawling over the word letter by letter, coming to rest in the martini glass of the Y like some 1930's chorus girl, naked except for a giant olive. Frye had given up the chase.

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"You were asking about Tippi Tippi," said Hartman.

Frye grimaced. "It doesn't matter."

"Anyway, I did change planes there once," said Hartman. "A big slag heap is all it is. But, hey, one crazy thing did happen. This native woman runs over to me in the terminal and stuffs goat cheese up my nose. No way to treat Manua Manua, The Demanding One."

Queenie laughed until the tears came. "Manua Manua means Old Fusspot," she explained.

Frye's grin faltered. "No big deal, Miss Plum, but how come you know that?"

She dabbed her eyes. "I just came back from working for two years for King-Sullivan's subsidiary in French Polynesia, the Tippi Tippi Tin Company," she said.

"Have party, will travel," smiled Scotty Curtis, peering down at them from the crosspiece of the T in TOWER. Behind him, decorating the letters like bright leggy birds in trees were a half dozen blondes, brunettes, and redheads in a variety of stewardess uniforms. They gave their "Welcome aboard" smiles and waved martini makings. Curtis dropped down to the ledge. "No Leonard, Mr. Frye," he said, looking briefly sad-eyed. "Guess The Mail Fist got him."

Frye shook his head. He was trying to remember the old trick of making his eyes focus. He found his legs under his body and pushed himself erect, wondering why it was customary to be standing when you point the accusing finger.

"No," he said. "The watermark threw me off. I didn't know Tippi Tippi was French." Just for an instant Frye released his accusing-finger hand from the O and jabbed it at Hartman. "Scotty-baby, say hello to your Uncle Rex." Curtis looked puzzled. "Remember, he's lost some weight," insisted Frye. "Puff out the cheeks, Hartman," he ordered, displaying the man's ample trouserleg.

"Now listen," growled Hartman, "I can explain. This afternoon I flew in from the West Coast on what had to be the original foul-up airline. They—" ("Boo—hiss!" cried the stewardesses in chorus; the redheaded one wearing the flying-clay-pipe insignia of Blarney Airlines was pouring martinis; she added a spiteful dollop of vermouth to Hartman's.) Hartman held up a hand for silence. "Anyway, I ended up with a suitcase full of this jumbo stuff by mistake. Listen, tonight I'm booked to give a speech on the art of mixing a hartman at the convention of

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Bartenders and Barmaids of America. The rest of my clothes haven't arrived from the Coast yet. So I had to put this stuff on while the suit I came in is at the cleaner's."

"He isn't Uncle Rex," said Scotty Curtis. "But I know that face from somewhere."

"Tippi Tippi," said Queenie out of the blue. "Somehow I see Hartman here standing in a grove of breadfruit trees on Tippi Tippi."

"Hold it!" called the blonde stewardess in the saronglike uniform of Aloha-Transpacific. "Fasten your seat belts and observe the 'No Smoking' sign, girls. Tippi Tippi just rang a bell. Little Scotty's been stringing us all along with that eligible-bachelor line."

She pointed her finger at Queenie. "Girls, meet Mrs. Curtis." The girls groaned. The blonde nodded. "How could I ever forget Mrs. Curtis? A few weeks ago this little lady flew into Tahiti on Air Tippi Tippi and boarded my flight for San Francisco. When a flock of seagulls waddled out onto the runway ahead of us she broke into the cockpit and held the crew at bay for two hours with a martini stirrer until those gulls made up their minds to waddle off again." The girls were clambering back over the letters now, muttering all the way.

"This is crazy!" shouted Curtis. "She's not my wife."

"Fast-talk your way out of this one the way you sweet-talked your way into my heart, hubby mine," said Queenie. "The jig's up. Tell them what you've done with Leonard."

"Mr. Frye, why in the world would I want to harm Leonard?" asked Curtis.

Frye looked to Queenie for the answer. She took a deep breath and said, "The idea was to hold Leonard for ransom to pay off pressing gambling debts. He's into Stolfuz for a bundle."

"Right, I forgot he was buddy-buddy with Pennsylvania Dutch," said Frye, amused at how clumsy his tongue had grown.

Curtis licked his lips. "Maybe I can explain," he said. "A friend of mine has this terrible affliction—he's a dead ringer for this Stolfuz guy. I mean, the police surround his house and call in to him to come out with his hands up; old ladies thump him with their umbrellas and shifty types slip him money and mumble out of the side of their mouths about Loping Lady in the Second at Doggy Downs."

"And you can produce this friend, right?" smiled Frye.

Curtis swallowed and shook his head. "Wrong. He's the friend in the hospital I mentioned earlier."

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"Don't tell me, let me guess," said Frye. "Plastic surgery."

Curtis nodded. "Now he looks like the face on this South Sea statue we came across one afternoon in the Museum of Modern Man. My friend was quite taken by it, you know, as one of a kind."

Frye grinned and slid back down onto the ledge. He found it comical that someone as drunk as he was could be expected to unravel truth from all this falsehood. And yet they were all there, waiting for his pronouncement.

Queenie, having run out of bird seeds, was absently crumbling up dog biscuits for the impatient pigeons. Hartman was helping himself from the pitcher of martinis left behind by the stewardesses. As the wind bellied his clothes out and then let them subside again, he looked sometimes like Uncle Rex and sometimes not. Scotty Curtis leaned against the T, counterfeiting nonchalance.

Frye found concentration difficult. He couldn't seem to furrow his brow and keep his eyes open at the same time. And his hearing was starting to go—the cooing of the pigeons had slurred. Frye looked up. Pigeons were scattered about in feathered disarray.

"Oh, damn," said Queenie, looking down at the uncrumbled half of a dog biscuit in her hand. Quickly, using Frye's shoulder as the first step, she scrambled to the top of the O. She brandished the martini stirrer. "Don't try following me. Yes, I laced the dog biscuits with knockout drops and yes, when Leonard passed out, I bound and gagged him. Yes again, our plan was to disinherit Curtis here and then murder Aunt Charlotte and Rex in turn. But I want you all to know I'd never have let any harm come to Leonard. I'd never harm a doggie or a birdie. You see, I came to Tippi Tippi—"

"Mr. Frye," said Curtis, "since this whole thing has been cleared up, could you give me a note for the girls? You know, something official to get me off the hook."

"You see, I came to Tippi Tippi expecting to find a tropic island paradise," said Queenie, as Frye fumbled for a pencil. "But except for—"

"Hey, Frye, write me one, too," grinned Hartman. "I'm in no condition to appear before the Bartenders and Barmaids of—"

Queenie banged the stirrer angrily. "You'd all better hear me out," she warned. The menace in her words brought silence. Frye particularly was all

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ears. "That's better," said Queenie quietly. "Now as I was saying, I came to Tippi Tippi expecting to find a tropic island paradise. But except for long walks out over the slag, there was nothing to do but play bridge with the Tippi Tippi Tin people or drink rum drinks out of coconut shells in the Castaways Room of the Hotel Paul Gauguin. The island's only tourist attraction was The Garden of Naval Memories. That's where I met Rex—or the Tippi Tippi Ton as the natives affectionately called him.

"Rex had turned his backyard into a combination rock garden and museum, except instead of rocks he used live World War I and II naval mines, the harvest of his beachcombing years. When Rex wasn't showing tourists around the naval mines, he was out searching for Red Rover's Trove. It was his dream to one day find the legendary seadog's pirate treasure which, some say, lies buried on Tippi Tippi.

"I've always been attracted to men with dreams. And yet I think what drew me most to Rex was his age and a little white lie he told to win my heart—the one about his being the sole heir of his rich sister Charlotte. I found out the truth after we were married and my dream of becoming a wealthy and relatively young widow went up in smoke. It was at that critical juncture that love pedaled into my heart. Yes, Gaston Chenier, our new postman, rode his bicycle up to our front door."

Frye's head snapped up.

"Yes, Gaston fell for me like a ton of bricks," said Queenie. "He swore he'd make me his wife and rich in the bargain. The plan was to disinherit Scottie by abducting Leonard and making sure you APL people heard about it. Then some of Gaston's post-office buddies in Switzerland would trigger an avalanche that would bury Aunt Charlotte's clinic or send it bouncing down the mountainside. Meanwhile, back on Tippi Tippi, Gaston would have wired up The Garden of Naval Memories so that on word of the old lady's passing he could blow Rex sky-high. It was all as easy as that."

Frye pulled out the photo of a handsome, dark-haired man in the smart dress uniform of a French postman, first class, including the silver bicycle clip on the pantleg. "Is this your Gaston?" When she nodded he said, "Then you'd never have lived to enjoy the money. That man is Reynard de St. Médor, Past-Master-General of The Mail Fist. Your bloody inheritance would have become the new

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treasury of an organization dedicated to seeking out and destroying dogs everywhere. Now where's Leonard?"

The blood had drained from Queenie's face. "I don't know," she said tearfully. "I was to leave my apartment with the door unlocked. While I was gone, someone was to come and take Leonard away to a nice home where he could start a new life with forged dog tags."

"You mean a one-way ticket to the Dead Letter Office," said Frye. "Unless we move fast. Quick!" he shouted. But his legs refused to function. "Quick!" he pleaded and with Queenie pulling, Curtis pushing, and Frye helping as best he could, they managed to get him up over the O. Hartman followed, booming out encouragement and carrying the drinks. But by the time they reached the crossbar of the T, they were panting with exhaustion.

Suddenly Queenie uttered a quiet damn. Coming toward them over the letters and moving nimbly in spite of his enormous bulk was the fattest man Frye had ever seen. "Surprise, Queenie," he called. "Your Rex knew he'd find you if he followed the bird seed."

"Quick!" shouted Frye. "Back the other way." But they were all too tired to move.

"You're fatter than I remember, Uncle Rex," panted Curtis.

The fat man smiled and squatted down atop the R. "Marriage does that to a man, Scotty my boy," he said. "I see you've met the little woman. I guess you don't mind having another rich aunt, eh, my boy?" He answered Queenie's glance with a nod. "Yes, my dear, I found Red Rover's Trove—pearls the size of pickled eggs, rubies like buttered beets, diamonds, emeralds, and sapphires like a bright cascade of gumdrops. All that and plump doubloons."

"Yes," he continued, "depressed by your leaving I took to night wandering on the beach, pondering the reason why. Last week as I returned home I spied a flashlight bobbing out in the back yard. Before I could investigate I heard a French curse and a sound like a hammer or a monkey wrench bouncing off metal. Suddenly my Garden of Naval Memories blossomed and I was thrown to the beach by a series of bright explosions.

"When dawn came I found that nothing was left of our love nest or of the sleeping native village nearby but a gaping hole in the ground and a bicycle leaning against a shattered palm. And there in the bottom of the hole was an iron

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chest: Red Rover's Trove. Riches beyond belief. I tossed a double handful into a suitcase and took the first flight out. I'm here to take you home."

Queenie cocked a skeptical eye. "Let's see a jewel or two. You've lied to me before."

Uncle Rex spread his hands helplessly. "I'm afraid there was a baggage mixup on the flight in. Somebody ended up with my suitcase."

"I'll bet we can help him there, eh, Mr. Hartman?" smiled Frye.

Hartman smiled back. "What the hell, Mrs. Hartman didn't raise her boy Dane to be a thief. I've got your suitcase, Mr. Curtis." He dug a thumbnail-sized diamond out of his pocket. "Here. Been carrying this around as sort of a lucky piece until this business was straightened out."

"Your honesty will be rewarded beyond your wildest dream, sir," promised Uncle Rex. Then he stopped dead. "My dear, this gentleman, isn't he a veritable spitting image of that heathen idol in the grove just beyond the village? Manua Manua. They stuff goat's cheese up its nose to placate its anger."

"I thought it was just a scarecrow to keep the cockatoos out of the breadfruit trees," she said.

"Manua Manua?" said Scotty Curtis. "Say, that was the name of the statue my friend used as a model for his new face."

Queenie, who had checked out the diamond by scratching it on the crystal of Frye's wrist watch, said, "Okay, Rex, you've won my heart again."

The fat man danced a quick little jig. Scotty was all smiles. Hartman beamed. "Looks like happy endings all around."

"And what about Leonard?" said Frye grimly.

Informed of the tragedy of Leonard, Uncle Rex clucked sympathetically. "Now who'd want to harm a dumb animal?" (Frye opened his mouth, then closed it; he had no right to speak; he had failed Leonard and dogs everywhere.) "Say," said Uncle Rex, "was Leonard a white Pomeranian? Because I came up in the elevator with two gentlemen in raincoats and when the door opened on this floor a mailman was standing there waiting to go down. When he saw us he made a dash for the service stairs. One of the two men drew a pistol, aimed it with both hands, and shouted, 'Hold it right there, postman. This is the APL!' "

"Agents Springer and Peake with my search warrants," nodded Frye.

"The mailman whirled," continued Uncle Rex. "He had

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a gun. I hit the deck. He fired and one APL man fell, a bullet in his shoulder. Crouching down behind me, the other APL man returned the fire. Bang, bang, bang, bang! The mailman struck a different pose as each bullet hit him. When the shots stopped he fell and out of his mailbag popped this ruffled but very much alive Pomeranian."

The others had gone. Sitting there on the T, Frye reflected on the events of the past few hours and for the first time in as long as he could remember he was touched by a fleeting affection for his own kind. Queenie Plum Curtis, for example, though quite capable of burying a Swiss clinic or pushing it off an alp and blowing an entire Tippi Tippi village to smithereens, could never bring herself to harm a dog or a bird. And surely that was important. Perhaps in the end mankind would amount to something.

Frye was exhilarated by the thought that man might not always be looked down upon by the giraffe or snickered at by the hyena or relegated to that damp corner of the elephant's memory where all the distasteful things are stored. This pleasing glow stayed with him as he clambered back.

He turned the corner on all fours and came face to face with the white Pomeranian. "Hey, there, Leonard," he smiled. But Leonard's recent adventures hadn't improved his disposition. He bared a set of sturdy teeth and growled. Frye knew that he was expected to move out from the wall.

He tried to explain about his fear of heights. But Leonard found the explanation banal. His growl deepened and he advanced until they were nose to nose. Frye felt the dog's breath on his naked throat. There was only one thing to do: Frye bared his teeth and growled back.

Puzzled, Leonard adjusted his growl down a notch. Frye growled his reply and was startled by its deep menace. Leonard blinked and licked his lips. Then he turned and with one uneasy backward glance he ran away as fast as his little legs would carry him.

Frye knew he really wouldn't have bitten Leonard, the hand that fed him, so to speak. And as he watched the dog's backside diminish, a thought that would have made Thorogood Endicott proud of him came into his head. Quote: A noble adversary, the dog, but no match for man when it comes to the big bluff. Unquote.

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a *NEW* Inspector Ghote story by

H. R. F. KEATING

The newest short about Inspector Ghote (pronounced Go-tay) of the C.I.D. of Bombay, India . . .

Problem: to find one man among the thousands of Anglo-Indians, not to say anything of the thousands of Parsis and hundreds of Jews, the tens of thousands of Goans, the hundreds of thousands of Moslems, and the millions of Hindus in Bombay.

Clue: remember what C. Auguste Dupin said in "The Purloined Letter"? "Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing" that puzzles and baffles. "Perhaps the mystery is a little too plain . . . a little too self-evident."

Or to put it another way: finding one man among many is like finding one tree in a forest. Sometimes the simplest way is the best—that is, not to see the forest . . .

INSPECTOR GHOTE AND THE HOOKED FISHERMAN

by H. R. F. KEATING

The telephone on Inspector Ghote's scratched and whorled little desk in his tiny office tucked into an out-of-the-way corner of Bombay C.I.D. Headquarters shrilled out alarmingly. Ghote swallowed once, squared his shoulders, and picked up the receiver. Before he even had time to say his name a voice barked out at him from the earpiece. It was Deputy Superintendent Samant, sharp as a terrier dog, and not to be argued with even if the truth were not on his side.

"Ghote? I will not have my officers in their seats all day. Goondaism is getting worse and worse, and you are just sitting there. What is it you are doing now? Answer, man, answer."

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"It is figures for you, D.S.P. sahib," Ghote replied. "You were making most urgent request this morning—correct figures for goodas arrested while committing violence in the second quarter of last year."

"Figures, figures," snapped the voice at the other end of the line. "What good are figures only? We want action, man, action."

"Very good, D.S.P. sahib."

"Ghote?"

"Yes, D.S.P. Here, D.S.P."

"There is a man in the building, an Englishman. He has some sort of complaint. I have told them to send him up to you. You are to deal with it. Understood?"

"Yes, D.S.P. And what is the nature—"

"And, Ghote, he has demanded to see the Commissioner himself."

The phone clicked dead with total abruptness and at the next moment, after only the most perfunctory of knocks, the office door was thrust open by an extremely scared-looking peon; then a big-bellied Englishman strode in, his bright-banded straw hat still jammed above a florid, sweating face.

"You the Commissioner, or whatever he's called?" he demanded at once in a voice so loud that it seemed to fill the little office from dusty floor to fly-haunted ceiling fan.

"No," the Inspector said quickly. "Unfortunately I am not Commissioner. My name is Ghote. It is pronounced Go-tay, but it is spelled—"

"To hell with spelling," the Englishman battered in. "What good did that ever do, I'd like to know. How about someone payin' some attention to me for a change? I'm the one who's been cheated out of every penny he's got."

Ghote could hardly have been paying more attention to the cataract of sound that swirled and eddied all round the room, but he made an effort to assume an expression of even greater interest and begged his visitor to take a chair.

"If you will be so good as to supply full details," Ghote said, rapidly zipping open the drawer on the right-hand side of his desk where he kept his paper for note-taking.

"Right," said the Englishman, plumping down like a sack of coal on the stout chair in front of the desk. "Now get this. My name is Harper. Joe Harper to his friends, and they're many. And I saw this advert, stuck on a wall like back in Batley where I come from. You'll have heard of Batley, I daresay."

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed,"

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Ghote said with an inaccuracy all the more sweeping for the qualms he could not help feeling in employing it.

"Aye. Well, as I was sayin', I saw this advert and I gave a ring-up to the number it said. And the moment the feller told me he'd call me back I knew I was on to something. That's an old trick, you know. Ring back so as to make sure you aren't gettin' an inquiry from the police or any nasty, poke-nose lot of that sort."

"Oh, yes, that would be most regrettable," said Inspector Ghote.

"It would," Joe Harper agreed with sledgehammer blitheness. "Aye. So, as I was tellin' you, I fixed up with this feller. Golightly his name was, but he wasn't proper English, more one of your Indian half-and-halves. And what—"

"One moment, please," Ghote interrupted, looking up from his note-taking. "That name, Golightly. It seems to me extremely unusual. Would you be so kind as to spell it?"

"First you want to spell your name to me, and now you want me to spell his to you. What do names matter? It's catchin' the feller I want."

Nevertheless in response to the Inspector's mutely poised pen the Englishman did at last oblige with the spelling of Golightly. As soon as Ghote had finished writing the name he invited Joe Harper to go on.

"Right then I joined this club—the Budleigh Regis Fly Fishermen's and Deep Sea Anglers' Association, it was called—an' off we went. Well, when we got to Bombay we had to change planes to go to this place that begins with a K. You know, where all the filthy carvings are."

"Khajurao?" suggested Ghote. "That is a great tourist attraction."

Once more he resorted to spelling.

"Aye. That'd be it. Though why you want to go chanting out letters again is more than I can say."

"I was thinking it might be of assistance," Ghote explained.

He committed this one name more to paper and looked up.

"But there is not any fishing at Khajurao," he added.

"I'll say there isn't," Joe Harper agreed with a heavy wink. "Not that I'll ever see the place now, because when we got to Bombay I thought I'd drop off like and go later on my own—Joe Harper's no one's dogsbody—and when I went to collect my return ticket I found—"

"You had to collect your return ticket in Bombay? Surely that is most peculiar?"

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"I'll say peculiar. 'Specially when it turns out there's no such address as 346 Taj Mahal Street."

"Ah," said Ghote, "now I am seeing. You have become the victim of that miscreant with the unusual name."

"Aye. Golightly. And you'd better set about gettin' hold of him pronto."

"Getting hold? But surely that is question for the U.K. police. We will be in instant telegraphic commun—"

"U.K. police? Don't be daft. He's here. In ruddy Bombay. I've told you that a hundred times. He came on the flight with us. That's why I thought the whole deal was aboveboard. Because, I tell you, I had my doubts from the first. There's no flies on Joe Harper."

Ghote, looking across at the belly-jutting, puce-faced Englishman, could not help registering that in fact there were flies on the Budleigh Regis fly fisherman. Half a dozen had been buzzing around him ever since he had settled down and at this moment a couple were resting on his perspiring neck.

"Mr. Harper," he said, bringing his mind back to the matter in hand, "you are a fisherman and you—"

"Fisherman? I've never so much as hooked a tiddler in my life."

"But the Budleigh Regis Fly Fishermen's and Deep Sea Anglers' Association?" Ghote asked, consulting his notes.

"Oh, that," said Joe Harper. "Yes. Well, what I was about to say was that, as a fisherman, you would understand how difficult it would be to catch one particular fish out of all the many in the sea, and that is precisely the problem you are setting us."

"Aye, I am," said Joe Harper uncompromisingly. "I've given you the feller's name, I've told you he's here, and I've said he's cheated me. Now get after him. And if he's not caught in less than no time I'll be in to that Commissioner of yours wantin' to know the reason why."

A leaden chill welled up in Ghote. He could easily conceive that someone who appeared to be as utterly self-centered as this fat, sweating, and aggressive Englishman might well force his way to the Commissioner himself, with fearful repercussions for anyone who had not succeeded in keeping him out.

"Mr. Harper," he said firmly, "if I am to find this one Anglo-Indian from among the thousands in this city, not to speak of the millions of Hindus, the hundreds of thousands of Moslems, the tens of thousands of Goans, the thousands of Parsis and the hundreds of

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Jews, then you must tell more than you have so far."

"I've told you the lot," Joe Harper replied in a fresh squall of aggressiveness.

"No," said Ghote, "I think not."

"Not? What do you—"

Ghote cut into the sharply rising voice.

"For example, you did not tell that you came here on cut-price flight," he said.

"Cut-price—"

But then the big Englishman suddenly sagged.

"Yes, you're right," he said. "How did you know?"

A hollowly anxious note had replaced the bluster.

"A great deal of information comes into Headquarters here and is duly circulated," Ghote replied. "For some time we have been hearing about these false clubs that are set up to tempt people to pay only about half the fare Air India or B.O.A.C. charges. When someone is putting themselves outside the law in this way there is scope for many varieties of fraud, as you have found."

"Aye, that's true enough," said Joe Harper mournfully. "I'll have to ask the British Consul or somebody to stake me my fare home, and heaven knows where I'll find the money to pay them back. I'm right cleaned out."

"Well, is there anything more you have to tell me now?" Ghote said, more gently. "Let me assure you, the full truth can only be helpful to you."

"Oh, I don't know," the big Englishman answered. "There's not much more I can tell you, and that's a fact. You were right about one thing, though—it wasn't fishing I came here for. It was what the advert called a glimpse of the Erotic East, that place beginning with K—blessed if I can get my tongue round it yet. Only, when we'd got to Bombay, I found I'd somehow lost heart."

He looked across at Ghote, his face wrinkled like a deflating balloon with this painful effort to get to the bottom of things.

"You come to know it in the end," he went on, "that it won't make all that much of a difference, even if you do go off where nobody knows who you are. Well, any road—that's what I'd got to thinkin' when I decided to follow that Golightly out of the airport."

He brightened a little.

"But you should have seen his face," he said, "when he realized I was going with him. A right crosspatch. And no wonder, I suppose."

He gave a rueful grunt of a laugh, as if he had seen his

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situation clearly for perhaps the first time.

"He told me he had to go and phone his old mother," he said. "I suppose it was just to get rid of me. What a reason!"

His eyes dropped to where the shirt stretched across his great floppy belly was patched with dark sweat.

"Do you know," he said, "I believed him at the time. He seemed sincerelike. It made me think, What if my mother could see me now? Aye, I thought that, I did truly."

He looked up at Ghote as if seeking, despite all odds, some sort of assurance that he had not been too foolish. But Ghote was busy with a large yellow and white volume that had on its front cover a purple advertisement for Nirodh family-planning requisites.

In a moment he slammed its pages together, quickly picked up his telephone, and dialed a number.

In the stuffy heat of the little office the sound of the distant ringing could be heard clearly. Joe Harper shifted his bulk on his hard chair. Then a voice answered.

"Hello? Golightly here."

Inspector Ghote put his hand on the mouthpiece.

"It looks as if the news is good for you," he said to the erstwhile Budleigh Regis fly fisherman. "If there was only a single one of that unusual name in the Bombay Telephone Directory it was certain to be your man's mother."

He gave the Englishman an almost timid smile.

"You could be saying," Ghote ventured, "that we have got your fish on the end of our line."

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a NEW John Jericho story by

HUGH PENTECOST

John Jericho, the redheaded, redbearded giant of a painter, was thinking of the old days in Paris, when his career was just starting, when he felt immensely alive—and was mildly in love. And then it happened—the strange sort of thing that occurs so often in real life: the very girl he was remembering appeared out of the blue, needing his help. And Jericho, the fighter for the underdog, the fighter against the overdog, never turned down anyone in distress, and certainly not a love out of his past. Jericho is the Good Samaritan of contemporary detectives . . .

JERICHO AND THE DEADLY ERRAND

by HUGH PENTECOST

It was a chance meeting with an old love, almost forgotten with the passage of years, that brought John Jericho face to face with a violent murder. Words spoken to him in the strictest confidence set him on a path totally different from the ones taken by the police and the District Attorney's staff. That he walked that path at all was due to a blazing anger that made it imperative for him, personally, to see to it that Justice was not blind.

What developed into a bloody horror began in the most pleasant of ways. It was a summer day in New York City, one of those rare blue-sky days without smog or unbearable humidity. The sky was cloudless. Jericho, walking uptown on Fifth Avenue, felt younger than he was and carefree. This was a coincidence because, unsuspecting, he was about to encounter his youth again. He found himself thinking of a day like this in Paris, ten years or

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more ago, when he had been sitting at an outdoor café with friends, drinking a particularly good wine, watching the world go by, and thinking how marvelous it was just to be alive. He had been a young artist in those days, just launching a career that was to make him world-famous. The future hadn't seemed too important that day in Paris—just the present, the joy of being alive and doing what he wanted to do, of being mildly in love.

Remembering that, Jericho now paused at a crossing and looking east saw a sign outside a building: *WILLARD'S BACK YARD.* This was an expensive little restaurant he could afford to patronize in these days of success, and in the summer months there was a charming outdoor garden, shaded by awnings and potted trees. It would be pleasant to sit there and drink a glass of wine and remember Paris. So he turned east and went into Willard's.

Coincidences are the enemies of fiction writers, but life is full of them. Willard's was filling up for luncheon, but Willard, an old friend, found Jericho a table in the garden. People turned to look at him as he was led to his place. He was eye-catching: six feet four inches tall, 240 pounds of solid muscle, with flaming red hair and a blazing red beard.

He sat down, ordered a split of champagne, filled and lit a black curve-stemmed pipe, and leaned back to watch the world go by, just as he had years ago in Paris.

A woman was led to a table a few yards away from Jericho and he looked at her, enjoying her as he always enjoyed looking at beautiful women. She was, he guessed, in her very early thirties, expensively dressed, with an unusual personal electricity. There was something familiar about her, he thought—the familiar charm of a woman of taste and experience, without a veneer of toughness. This kind was rare—familiar but rare.

The woman looked at him, her dark violet eyes widening. "Johnny?" she said. It was a question.

She was no stranger. The absurd thing was that he had been thinking about her as he walked up Fifth Avenue, thinking of her as she had been ten or more years ago, thinking of her as she had been in Paris when he was mildly in love with her.

"Fay!"

He went over to her table and her small cool hands were in his.

"The beard," she said. "I

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wasn't sure for a moment."

He had been a smooth-faced young man in Paris. "May I join you? Are you expecting someone?"

"Please. No," she said.

He beckoned to the waiter to bring his wine.

"It's wild," she said. "I came in here because I was thinking of you and the old days."

"ESP," he said. "That's exactly what happened to me."

"Oh, Johnny!"

He ordered a stinger for her. Her taste couldn't have changed. Nothing had changed. He said something to that effect.

"I wear a size twelve dress today," she said. "It was an eight back in those days. That much has changed."

She had been a model in those Paris times. She had also been a member of a young group of Revolutionaries bent on destroying the establishment in general and General de Gaulle in particular. Jericho had thought of them as crackbrained and lovable, particularly Fay. She had posed for him and they had made love and she had forgotten about the Revolution. There had been no anxieties, no guilts, no regrets when they came to the inevitable parting.

"Of course I've kept track of you, Johnny. You're famous now. I've gone to all your exhibitions, including your one-man show at the Mullins Gallery last month."

"You're living in New York?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And you never tried to get in touch with me? I'm in the phone book."

"So am I. You've forgotten, Johnny, that it was you who walked out. You would have to do the getting in touch—if you wanted to."

"I was young and stupid," he said. "I always thought of you as still being back in that other world, taking pot shots at General de Gaulle."

She laughed. "We were pretty crazy kids, weren't we? No, I came back here right after we broke up. I am a respectable secretary now, for a man in the brokerage business. You may have heard of him. He's in the news these days. Lloyd Parker."

"He's running for the United States Senate. That your man?"

She nodded. A tiny frown edged lines in her forehead. "A fine man," she said. "A good warm idealistic man."

Her man? Jericho wondered. Something in her voice—

"I don't have very good luck with men, Johnny," she said, reading his mind. She'd been like that in the old days. "First it was you who mattered. You walked out. Then there was—is

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—Lloyd Parker. I am his efficient, loyal, ever-ready office machine. He couldn't get along without me—in the office. Out of the office he is married to a beautiful, exotic, fabulously rich gal. Crandall Steel—she was Ellen Crandall. I am the classic figure of the secretary hopelessly in love with her boss, preferring to work with him every day and not have him rather than drop him and find someone who might want me as a woman."

"There are probably a hundred such someones," Jericho said.

She seemed not to hear that. "I was thinking of you when I came in here, Johnny, because I need help."

"Oh?"

"I need advice from someone who understands how complex people are, who wouldn't make judgments by hard and fast rules. I thought that of all the people I'd ever known you never prejudged, never insisted that all people follow black-and-white formulas." She tried a smile. "I thought that if I could only get advice from you—and presto, here you are."

"Try me, before I make improper advances," he said, answering her smile.

Her frown returned and stayed fixed. "Lloyd is running against a man named Molloy—Mike Molloy to his friends. Molloy is a machine politician, supported by the big-city moguls, the hard-hats, the labor bosses. Perhaps not a bad man, Johnny, but not a man of Lloyd's caliber, not a potential statesman, not in any way an idealist. Lloyd could be Presidential material in the future. Molloy belongs to other men. Lloyd belongs to himself and his country."

"He can have my vote."

"Lloyd is about forty-five. He has always had a little money. His family was Plymouth Rock-Mayflower stuff. I say 'a little money' in comparison to his wife's fortune. He was graduated from Harvard in the late forties, having missed the War. He knew that sooner or later he would be faced with the Army, and he didn't know what he wanted to do, really. A college friend persuaded him to put some money into a business, one of the first computer-dating services. Lloyd had nothing to do with the operation of the business; he was just a part owner. Someone blew the whistle on them. Lloyd's partner was using information they gathered to blackmail clients. He was indicted, convicted, and sent to prison. Lloyd was cleared."

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"So?"

"After that came the Army in Korea. One day Lloyd's top sergeant asked him to mail a package for him. On the way to the post office Lloyd was stopped by M.P.s and it was discovered that the package contained about thirty thousand dollars in cash. The sergeant, it turned out, had been stealing the P.X. blind. There was a court-martial. The sergeant went to Leavenworth. Lloyd was cleared. He had simply been an innocent messenger boy."

"But not lucky with his friends or connections," Jericho said.

"Neither of these things was a great scandal at the time," Fay said. "They've been long forgotten. But suddenly they've reappeared in Wardell Lewis' political column. Lewis is supporting Molloy. Someone has fed him these two old stories, along with some malicious gossip about a love affair which Lloyd is supposed to have broken off in order to marry the Crandall money."

"A love affair with you, Fay?"

"No," she said sharply. "There is some truth in it, though. He did have an affair with a girl, he did break it off, he did marry Ellen Crandall five years ago. Lewis is using all this and I've been trying to find out who's been feeding Lewis this information."

"Any luck? The partner, the sergeant, the dropped girl?"

Fay shook her head. She looked at Jericho, her eyes wide. "Ellen, Lloyd's wife, is having an affair with Wardell Lewis."

"Wow!" Jericho said.

"Of course Lloyd has no knowledge of it," Fay said. "That's what creates my problem. He loves his wife deeply. If he learns the truth, I think it will destroy him. What do I do? Do I go to Lloyd and wreck his life with the truth? Do I go to her and Lewis and threaten them with exposure? They would laugh at me. Exposure, beyond what it might do to Lloyd personally, would ruin his political future. A cuckolded candidate for the Senate becomes a national joke." Fay brought her closed fist down on the table. "What do I do, Johnny?"

"Have another stinger," he said, wondering just what she should do. She obviously was in love with the man.

Jericho didn't come up with an immediate answer for Fay Martin. Parker, his wife, and Wardell Lewis were not real people to him. They were X, Y, and Z in a problem. Fay was

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real, very real. She had set out to help a man she loved and she could only help him, it developed, by hurting him terribly. It mattered to her whether or not Lloyd Parker won an election; but it mattered even more that he not be hurt.

The only thing that occurred to Jericho was that there might be a way to silence Wardell Lewis without using Ellen Parker's adultery as the weapon. Lewis' kind of muckraking journalism suggested the kind of man who might well have skeletons in his own closet. Jericho had friends. He would, he promised Fay, put something in motion.

Would she have dinner with him? That was impossible. She had to go to a public debate that was being held up in Westchester between Parker and Molloy. She would, however, join him for lunch again tomorrow. By then he might have dug up something that could be used as leverage against Lewis. A newspaperman and a friend in the District Attorney's office would nose around for Jericho. But Jericho promised he would not tell either of them about the triangle.

The next morning Jericho woke early as usual. He was in his apartment on Jefferson Mews in Greenwich Village. When he came out of the shower he switched on the radio to hear the eight o'clock news. What he heard turned him to stone.

Fay Martin was dead.

The facts, put together from the radio account and from the morning papers, were as follows: the debate between Lloyd Parker and Mike Molloy was to be held in the auditorium of the Community Center Building in White Hills. Parker and his wife had driven out there in his Cadillac and left the car, locked, in the parking area. Shortly before the debate was to begin, Parker's secretary, Fay Martin, had come out to the parking area and asked the attendant where the Parker Cadillac had been left. She identified herself and showed the man keys. Parker, she said, had left something he needed in the Cadillac's glove compartment.

The attendant pointed out where the car was and watched her go to it. She unlocked the door, got in, and leaned forward to open the glove compartment. An explosion blew the car and Fay to bits, started a raging fire, and severely damaged a half dozen other cars parked nearby.

The debate was never held.

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Some odd facts were turned up by the police. Parker, in a state of shock, denied that he had sent Fay to the car to get anything for him. She had, he told police, come to White Hills in her own car to make sure everything was in order for the debate. He hadn't sent her out to his car for anything. There wasn't anything he needed. Furthermore, he insisted that she didn't have a set of keys for the car, which he had locked himself. There was only one set of keys, his own, and he had them in his pocket. There was no other set! Why Fay had gone to the car and where she had got a set of keys was completely inexplicable to Parker.

The police were certain the bomb had been planted in the glove compartment and rigged so that when the compartment door was opened, the bomb would go off. The bomb had obviously been meant to kill Parker, the police said, since he was the only person who drove the Cadillac and the only person who had keys to it.

Except that there must have been a second set of keys.

Mrs. Ellen Parker confirmed her husband's statement. There was no second set of keys that she knew of. She had her own car—she never drove her husband's Cadillac.

Public outrage was high. People were sick of bombings and assassinations. A political analyst expressed the opinion that Parker, who had been running behind Molloy in the polls, would now be an odds-on favorite to win the election. Sympathy would push him into the lead. The Molloy forces would be high on the suspect list. Innocent as it might be, the Molloy machine had been put behind the eight-ball.

Jericho, his muscles aching from tension, didn't give a damn about the election.

Fay was dead—loyal, dedicated Fay, in love with a man who had passed her by for ten years, and for whom she had been murdered.

Someone must have handed Fay a set of keys, probably saying they were Parker's. "He wants you to get an envelope he left in the glove compartment of his car." Of course she had gone, cheerfully. She would have done anything in the world for Parker without question. Whoever gave her the keys, not Parker's, had to know what would happen when the glove compartment door was opened. The bomb hadn't been meant for Parker, not ever.

Fay was dead, and it had been meant that she should die.

Do you set an elaborate and

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dangerous trap to kill a girl simply because she has found out about a case of adultery? What did Ellen Parker have to lose if her affair with Lewis became public? She had all the money in the world; she was tired of her husband.

What did Lewis have to lose? His man-about-town reputation would only be enhanced by the news that Ellen Parker was his latest conquest. This was 1972, not 1872. Infidelity was no longer a "curiosity." Fay had wanted to keep Parker from learning the truth about his wife. To kill her to keep her silent made no sense, not when she would have kept silent under any circumstances.

But she had known something, or had done something, that called for violence—something, Jericho concluded, that she hadn't mentioned to him during their brief reunion.

The police, Jericho learned from his friend in the D.A.'s office, were still working on the theory that the bomb had been meant for Parker. Experts had put together small pieces. The bomb had evidently been a simple device—sticks of dynamite tied together, set off by a Fourth of July cap and triggered when the glove compartment door was opened. The killer didn't have to be an explosives expert.

There was simply no way to guess who had sent Fay on her deadly errand. She had died with that information unrevealed. The unexplained set of keys to the car was a puzzle. Parker, under persistent questioning, remembered that when he'd bought the Cadillac a year ago there had been a duplicate set of keys. He'd put them "in a safe place" and now hadn't the faintest recollection where that had been. Ellen Parker denied all knowledge of them. Fay might have known, but Fay was dead. The dead kept their secrets and the living would lie to suit their own purposes.

Jericho, convinced that the bomb had not been meant for Parker, was inclined to bypass the Molloy forces. Parker, dead by violence, could do nothing but harm them. Parker's forces could run Mickey Mouse and win. Molloy could only be involved if Fay had discovered something criminal about him and had kept it to herself long enough for Molloy's men to rig her death. But it didn't make sense. If she was a danger to Molloy he would have struck swiftly and less obviously, and would have made sure that it didn't appear to have been aimed at Parker.

Yesterday had been a blue-sky day, a day for reunions, a day to remember a carefree

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time, a day to promise help. Today the skies were dark and the rain, wind-swept, was swirling in the gutters. It was too late for promises, but not too late to demand payment in full.

A man wearing a slicker and a brown rain hat stood in the foyer of a remodeled brownstone on the east side. He had a bright red beard and his eyes were pale blue, and cold as two newly minted dimes. He had stood there while half a dozen people left the building to go to work, and two or three tradesmen arrived to deliver orders. The building's custodian had approached him on the subject of loitering, and a crisp ten-dollar bill had changed hands.

At about eleven o'clock a taxi stopped outside the building. A woman got out and ran across the sidewalk to the sanctuary of the foyer. She was a tall, very beautiful, very chic blonde. She looked at Jericho with a kind of detached curiosity as she pressed one of the doorbells in the brass nameplate board. The ring was a signal—one short, one long, two shorts. The woman's picture had been in the paper that morning, so Jericho had no doubts about her. "The Beautiful Mrs. Lloyd Parker" had been the newspaper caption.

The front door made a clicking sound and Ellen Parker opened it. Jericho was directly behind her, then inside before the door could close in his face. She gave him a startled look and hurried up the stairway to the second floor. Jericho was behind her and he could sense her sudden panic. She almost ran along the second-floor hallway to the apartment in the rear. The door was opening and a man in a seersucker robe was smiling at her—and the man with the red beard was directly behind her.

There was a moment of confusion.

"Ward!" Ellen Parker cried out.

She was pushed hard from behind, then she and Wardell Lewis and Jericho all wound up inside the apartment. The door was closed and Jericho was leaning against it. Lewis, tall, with longish dark hair and a mod mustache, was naked under the seersucker robe. He looked around, obviously frightened, for a weapon.

"He followed me in," Ellen Parker said in a husky voice.

The world is full of black tales about the city and its violences. Women are attacked and robbed in the hallways of their apartment houses; drug addicts steal, even kill, for the

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price of a fix. It would come like this, they were thinking—unexpected, catching them totally unprepared.

Jericho took off his rain hat and shook the water out of it. He tossed it onto a chair near the door.

Lewis' eyes widened. He was the man-about-town, the gossip hunter, the man who knew everyone. "You're John Jericho, the painter!" he said.

"I'm John Jericho, friend of Fay Martin's," Jericho said. "We'll have a talk and I hope for your sake you'll answer questions."

"What do you mean by breaking in this way?" Lewis demanded.

"I wanted to catch you two together," Jericho said. "Fay told me about you. I wanted to make sure for myself. Now I'm going to get the truth about last night if I have to scrape you out of your shells."

Lewis walked over to a table in the center of the room and took a cigarette from a lacquered box. It was a cluttered room, every inch of the wall space covered with photographs of celebrated people in society, politics, and show business, all autographed to Wardell Lewis. Lewis held a table lighter to his cigarette with an unsteady hand.

"If you were a friend of Parker's secretary," he said, "I can understand why you're so steamed up. But so help me, I'm going to have you arrested for breaking and entering, and for threatening us with violence."

Jericho's pale eyes were fixed on the woman who was standing behind a chair, gripping it to support herself. He appeared not to have heard Lewis. Fay had been right—she was beautiful. What, he wondered, did she see in a creep like Lewis?

"Fay had found out about you and Lewis," Jericho said to her. "But she was willing to do anything to keep your husband from finding out that you were having an affair with this clown and feeding him information that could hurt your husband. You didn't need to kill Fay."

Ellen Parker's eyes were wide with fright. "That bomb wasn't meant for Fay, God help her," she said. "It was meant for me!"

"Keep still, Ellen," Lewis said. "This man is your enemy."

"What makes you think the bomb was meant for you, Mrs. Parker?" Jericho asked.

"Because I was meant to go to the car," she said. She looked as if her legs were about to fold under her. She clung to the chair.

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"Take it slowly from the beginning," Jericho said. He told himself he had an ear for the truth. Lewis was the kind of man who'd grown up saying, "I didn't do it!"—but Ellen Parker was something else again. She was two-timing her husband, betraying his secrets, but she obviously believed what she had just said. She believed the bomb had been meant for her.

"It was at the White Hills Community Center, just before last night's debate was about to begin," Ellen Parker said. "I had left my seat to go to the powder room. When I came back there was an envelope on my seat. In it was a set of car keys and a scribbled note saying my husband wanted me to get an envelope he'd left in the glove compartment of his car. He was up on the speaker's stand on the stage. He smiled and waved at me. I waved back, indicating I'd do what he asked—waved back with the note."

"Was the note in your husband's handwriting?"

"No. I thought one of his staff had written it. I was just starting to edge my way out of the row of seats when Fay appeared. She asked me if anything was wrong, because they were just about to start. I told her Lloyd needed something from the car and she said she'd get it. I—I was glad not to have to go, so I gave her the keys and the note."

"Which were blown up in the car with her," Lewis said. "Ellen can't prove a word of what she's saying and he denied he asked anyone to get anything."

"He?"

"Parker, for God's sake. Who else? Of course he denies it—he meant to kill Ellen!"

"Why?"

"Because he'd found out about us, why else?"

"I don't dare go home," Ellen Parker said, her voice shaking. "The police were there all last night—to protect him. But once they're gone he may try again."

"The man's turned into a homicidal maniac," Lewis said. "Ellen and I are going to have to get protection from the police."

"Were you at the Community Center in White Hills last night, Lewis?" Jericho asked.

"Of course I was there," Lewis said. "I'm covering the campaign, as you know if you read the papers."

Jericho glanced at Ellen Parker. "And how you're covering the campaign!" he said. "A man who goes berserk and tries to kill his wife for an infidelity doesn't usually leave out the wife's lover. Well,

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maybe Parker's saving you for dessert."

"You think it's something to joke about?" Lewis said. "I've had about enough of this." He bent down and opened the drawer of the table behind which he was standing. His hand didn't get out of the drawer with the revolver—Jericho moved too fast. His left hand grabbed Lewis' right wrist and brought it down on the edge of the table. The gun fell noiselessly to the rug. Jericho's right hand swung to Lewis' jaw. The columnist's head snapped back and he collapsed on the rug without a sound.

Ellen Parker didn't move from her place behind the chair, still clutching it for support. Her eyes, wide with fear, were fixed on Jericho, as if she expected to be next. He was moving toward her and she obviously wanted to scream, but couldn't. He took her arm gently.

"There are things I need to know about your husband," he said. "Could we go somewhere else to talk—somewhere that smells less of treachery?"

She made no move to go to Lewis, but asked, "Is he hurt?"

"He will have a severe headache—I hope," Jericho said.

They sat together in a corner booth in a little restaurant a couple of blocks from Lewis' apartment. The rain had let up and they had walked there, Ellen Parker in a kind of trance. Jericho ordered coffee, with brandy to lace it. He leaned back in the booth, watching her, waiting for her to speak. There was something unexpectedly vulnerable about her. She wasn't the kind of woman he had expected.

"I've destroyed myself," she said finally, not looking at Jericho. "It's always been that way. I have always destroyed everything that has been good in my life."

"Your marriage?" he asked quietly.

"Since I was a little girl I've always been afraid that people only liked me because I was so rich. I never believed that any man really wanted me for myself. I always tested them and tested them until I drove them away. Then Lloyd Parker came into my life and for the first time I really believed I was loved and wanted for myself, that my money didn't have anything to do with how he felt about me. For the first time in my life I was happy, without doubts, without fears."

"What changed it?"

"This venture into politics," she said, drawing a deep breath. "You can't get elected dog

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catcher these days, Mr. Jericho, without spending a great deal of money. Lloyd asked me for a great deal of money and I gave it to him gladly, happily. Then, as soon as I did, he seemed to lose interest in me. Our love life came to an end. I told myself it was because he was working fourteen-eighteen hours a day. But the old doubts, the bitter certainty that it was only my money he wanted, took charge again. I guess I went a little crazy. I went out on the town looking for a man, any man, who'd find me attractive without knowing I was rich, rich, rich. It was Ward Lewis who picked me up and restored my ego."

"Lewis, who knew who you were from the first moment he laid eyes on you, knew you were rich, rich, rich, and who planned to use you to help the Molloy crowd."

"I wanted to hurt Lloyd," she said, her lips trembling. "I wanted revenge. And—and I hated myself."

"Good for you," Jericho said.

"Last night, when Lloyd told me that he knew about Ward and me, I—"

"He *knew*?" Jericho sat up straight.

"He told me while we were driving out to White Hills. There'd been an anonymous letter. He'd checked on me and found out it was true. I knew how much it hurt him and I was glad for a moment. But he was wonderful about it. He took the blame, admitted he'd neglected me, begged me to give him another chance. I almost began to believe in him again."

"Why do you suppose he told you he knew if he was planning to kill you?" Jericho asked.

She looked at him, her eyes wide. "So I'd know, at the last moment when the bomb went off, why I was dying."

"That makes him into some kind of monster," Jericho said.

Ellen Parker closed her eyes. "God help me," she said.

The receptionist in the brokerage offices of Sheftel & Parker was not cordial.

"I'm afraid Mr. Parker can't see you today, Mr. Jericho. If you've heard the news—"

"Give him this note," Jericho said. "I think he'll see me."

Jericho felt out of place in the paneled waiting room with its rich green-leather furnishings. His corduroy jacket and turtlenecked shirt were altogether too casual for this palace of wealth. There was another out-of-place man sitting in one of the big chairs across the room. Jericho's artist's eyes

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picked up details that might have escaped others. A slight bulge at the other man's waistline spelled gun. Cop, Jericho thought. The police weren't risking another attempt on Parker's life.

The receptionist, looking mildly surprised, reappeared. "Mr. Parker will see you," she said.

She led Jericho into an inner room. He was aware that the waiting man had risen and was following him. In the inner room another out-of-place man faced him. He showed a police shield.

"Mr. Parker doesn't know you, Mr. Jericho. Under the circumstances you'll understand why we must make sure you're not armed."

Jericho raised his arms languidly. The man behind tapped Jericho over. There was a moment of tension when he felt a bulge in the pocket of the corduroy coat. It turned out to be Jericho's pipe.

Lloyd Parker was about six feet tall, with soft, curly brown hair. He had a square jaw, and the crow's-feet at the corners of his brown eyes suggested a man of good humor. But those eyes were red-rimmed, probably from lack of sleep. He looked like a man fighting exhaustion. This had been Fay's kind of man, Jericho thought: gentle, undemanding, considerate. Most people would instinctively like Lloyd Parker under normal circumstances. Now he was undermined by tensions and anxiety. He stood in front of his big flat-topped desk, leaning against it.

"Your note, Mr. Jericho, tells me that you were a friend of Fay's, which is why I agreed to see you. It also says that you know where my wife is. Why should you think that would interest me?"

"Aren't you wondering if she's gone back to Wardell Lewis?"

A muscle rippled along Parker's jawline. "Just what, exactly, do you mean by that?"

"Oh, come, Mr. Parker, let's not waste time with games. I've just been talking to your wife. I knew about the affair from Fay."

"Fay? Fay knew?"

"Fay knew and was prepared to do anything to keep you from finding out about it. But you did find out."

Parker's face hardened. "What do you want of me, Mr. Jericho?"

"I want to ask you a question before I call in those cops out there and charge you with the murder of Fay Martin and the intention to murder your wife."

Parker's mouth dropped and

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he gasped for air like a landed fish. "You're out of your mind!" he whispered.

"I think not." Jericho's voice was matter-of-fact. "Your wife got your instructions to go to the car, where a bomb was waiting for her. By mischance Fay offered to do the errand for her. I said in my note that I know where your wife is. I do. She's not with Lewis, if that matters to you. But it must be obvious to you that she won't see you or go back home with you. She's afraid you might try again."

"This is sheer madness!" Parker said. "I don't want my wife dead. I love her. There's nothing in the world that matters to me without her. I had nothing to do with the bomb, I sent no message asking her to go to the car, I had just been pleading with her to give our marriage a second chance."

"When did you tell Fay she could stop looking for the person who was feeding Wardell Lewis with information about you?"

"Last night, just a little while before the debate was to begin. I told her the truth—that I'd found out Ellen was having an affair with Lewis, which explained his source of information."

"She wasn't shocked, Parker. She had told me earlier in the day about the affair. She was, as I told you, prepared to do anything to keep you from knowing."

"She told me that. I was grateful, but I explained to her that Ellen was all that mattered to me, that I'd do anything to get her back."

Jericho's eyes wandered toward a small bar in the corner of the office. "Do you mind if I pour myself a drink?"

"Yes, I mind!" Parker said. "Does Ellen really think I tried to kill her?"

"She's sure of it," Jericho said. He went over to the bar and poured himself a bourbon. He looked at Parker and raised his glass in a silent toast. "Maybe I can persuade her that she's wrong."

"But you just threatened to—"

"I know," Jericho said. "You have an extraordinary effect on women, Parker. One of them runs away from you and into the arms of a heel because she thinks you don't love her enough. Another gives up being a woman for ten years just to breathe the same air that you do. But I don't suppose Fay ever gave up hope that some day, somehow, you might be more than that to her."

"Poor Fay."

"Yes, poor Fay," Jericho said. "It could have been this

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way, Parker. When she found out about your wife's affair with Lewis she wanted to save you the hurt. Your wife's death might be a terrible blow to you, but having your male ego shattered would be even worse. I think she had already planned a way when she talked to me at lunch yesterday. Maybe she hoped I'd come up with a better answer, but unfortunately I didn't.

"So it was she, it was Fay who rigged the bomb in your car. Keys? There was a spare set which you'd put 'in a safe place' that you no longer could remember. Fay knew. Your secretary, Parker, your devoted, loving secretary knew. Your wife might not know your 'safe place,' or the size of your collar, or how you liked your eggs, but Fay knew; she knew everything there was to know about you and she cherished the knowledge."

"It doesn't make sense," Parker said, his voice shaken. "How would *she* know how to rig a bomb? Fay? Impossible!"

"Quite possible," Jericho said. "There's an odd fact I know about her that you'd have no reason to know. When I first met Fay in Paris ten or twelve years ago she was a model. I am a painter. She was also a member of a wild young revolutionary group that was constantly demonstrating, bombing, and burning. Their aim was to get rid of General de Gaulle. They were trained by experienced people. She would have the know-how to make a simple bomb.

"I met her, she modeled for me, we fell in love in a sort of way, and for a good many months she forgot about being a Mata Hari. When we parted she came back here and went to work for you. But she had the knowledge about explosives."

"And you say she meant to kill Ellen?"

"I think so. She would kill Ellen and at the same time improve your election prospects, because Molloy and his crowd would be suspected. She prepared the note that would send your wife out to the car and left it on her seat. It must have been after she'd done that you told her you knew. More important—more devastating to Fay—you made it clear that Ellen was still all that mattered to you. That there'd be no future for Fay even if Ellen died. If Ellen was the only one you wanted, poor defeated Fay would make certain you had her. She must have hurried to retrieve the note and the keys. But Ellen already had them."

"Good God."

Jericho looked at his empty glass. "So she volunteered to

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run the errand for Ellen."

"Knowing the bomb was in the car?"

"Maybe she thought she could deactivate it. Maybe, in that brief trip to the parking lot she decided to take it as a way out. Perhaps she thought she would be doing you a last service. The bomb would at least end Molloy's chances of defeating you in the election."

"Can you prove this?"

"Not one word of it," Jericho said. He turned back to the bar and poured himself another drink. "But I might persuade your wife that it's true. Care to come with me and help me try?"

'Q'

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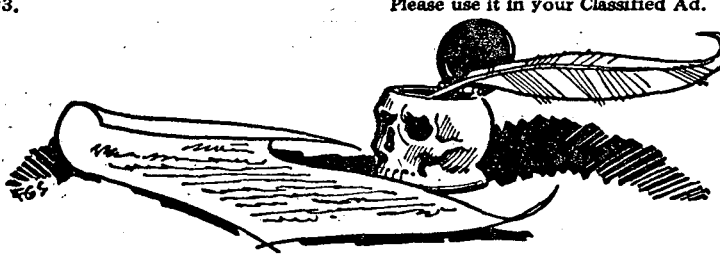

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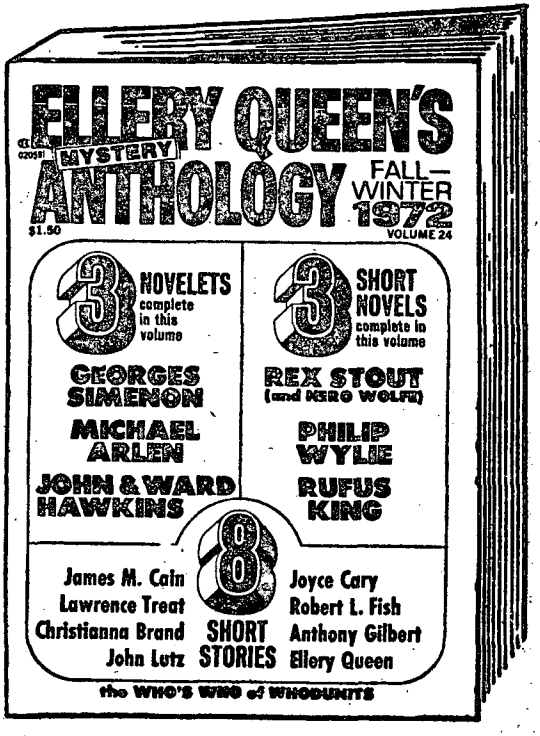

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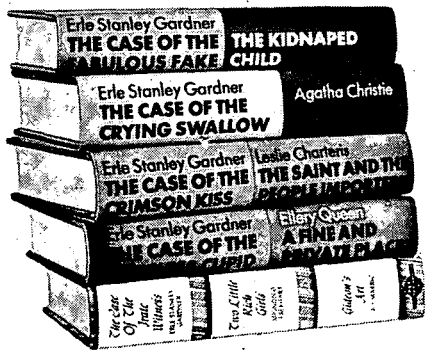

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